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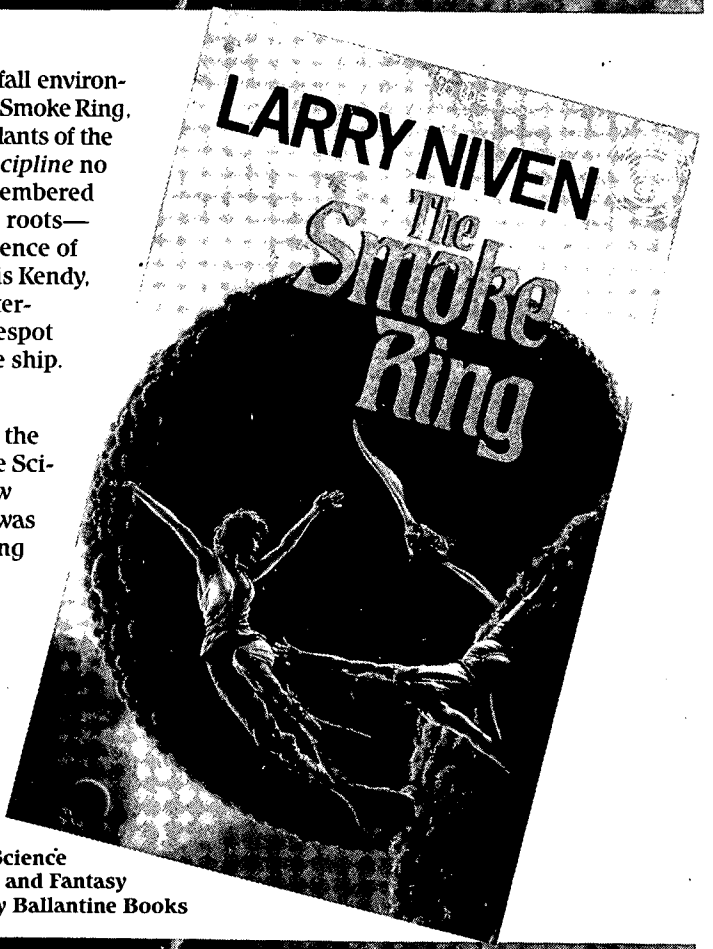

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EDITORIAL

by Isaac Asimov

FANTASTIC VOYAGE II

I try not to use these editorials to tout my own books. In fact, I'm opposed to hucksterism in general—at least for myself. I don't engage in publicity tours, and I take part in autographing sessions only when the occasion presents itself to the point where refusing would seem rude, or at times when my publishers insist. (After all, they also stand to gain if the book does well.)

Nor am I huckstering now. To be sure, as I sit here writing this, my novel *Fantastic Voyage II* has not yet been published, but by the time this appears, it will have been on the bookshelves for months and it will have done well or it will have dropped dead. This editorial won't have any significance in that connection, one way or the other, so I can speak freely.

The reason I'm writing this, of course, is that I have already seen a review by an anonymous reviewer and have sighed a little over it. In among various of his stupidities, he condemned me for not "choosing" to write a sequel to the original *Fantastic Voyage*.

Whether I choose to do so or not is, of course, none of this retarded pipsqueak's business. Nor would his primitive mind grasp the fact that I might possibly have had no choice in the matter. In any case, let me tell you the story behind the book.

Back in 1966, Hollywood was making a movie called *Fantastic Voyage*. Bantam Books had bought the paperback rights to the book and asked me to write a novel based on the movie script for a flat fee of $5000. I hesitated, and tried to refuse, because novelizations of movie scripts were just throwaways designed to tout the movie and disappeared as soon as the movie left the screen. However, Bantam blandished and blandished and I finally said yes but only on condition that a hard-cover edition appear.

I managed to persuade Houghton Mifflin to agree to do a hardcover edition, even though they feared that a paperback edition (out of which they would get nothing) would kill sales. I swore that no paperback edition would affect the hardcover sales of my book and, for a wonder, they believed me. They put out the hardcover edition and it is still in print, and selling,

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twenty-one years later. The softcover came out in time and is still in print, and selling, also. It was the first movie novelization, as far as I know, that appeared in hardcover and that survived the first run of the movie.

Moreover, I worked so quickly and Hollywood so slowly that the hardcover came out six months before the movie was released and everyone thought the movie was done from my book, rather than vice versa. I explained the truth about a trillion times, but it did no good. In any case, the book was a success and after the paperback had gone through twenty-four printings, and Bantam had injudiciously admitted that the sales were far better than they had expected, I squeezed another $2500 out of them.

Even though the book was a resounding success, I was never satisfied with it. It was not the product of my own imagination, and that made me unhappy—and a little ashamed.

And then several years ago, some people bought the rights to the *title* of the movie, and *nothing more.* In other words, they could have someone write a book called *Fantastic Voyage II* and it could deal with the concept of miniaturized human beings within a body, but it could *not* make use of the characters or situations in the first book. (And, of course, it never occurred to the cretin who reviewed *Fantastic Voyage II* that this might be the case.)

The movie people naturally

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turned to me to write *Fantastic Voyage II* and presented me with a treatment that had been written by the same people who had done the first movie. It involved *two* submarines in a human bloodstream, one American and one Soviet, and after that it was World War III.

I turned it down flatly. I wasn't going to write another book based on someone else's imagination; I wasn't going to write a book dealing with violence and war; and in any case, I wasn't going to write a novel for anyone but Doubleday.

We went through a lot of hassle over it and I weakened somewhat (to my own shame, be it said) when they talked huge sums of money. However, I held out for doing my own book my own way for Doubleday and even though the possibility of a lawsuit was mentioned, I stuck to my guns, and the deal fell through.

The movie people asked another writer to do it. I admit that I had the fugitive thought that the other writer would turn out a book that would make a trillion dollars and that I'd be sorry, but I dismissed that thought sternly and continued to work on the novel I had in my typewriter, which was *Robots and Empire*. I forgot about *Fantastic Voyage II* altogether.

And then, quite out of nowhere, I was suddenly approached again. The novel that had been written by the other writer was unsatisfactory and they wanted me to take over the job. I asked to see the manuscript that had been written, and I found that it followed the treatment thoroughly and that it was excellently written. I said, flatly, that there was nothing wrong with the manuscript and that they should make use of it. They absolutely refused. It was an Asimov book or nothing.

So I set my terms again. I was not to be bound by the treatment and I would not make use of anything that was in the manuscript by the other writer. (They told me that they would get him to agree to let me make whatever use I wished of his version—but I was bound and determined not to depend on someone else's imagination no matter what the cost.) The book, moreover, had to be published by Doubleday and, finally, I insisted that the other writer be compensated fully for his work, and indicated to him and to Doubleday that I would have no objection to his selling his version for publication if he could. (I was not going to be put in the position where anyone could say I had used my "name" to undercut a fellow-writer in any way.)

Rather to my astonishment, my terms were met. What's more, I made my contract with Doubleday only, and left it to Doubleday to make a contract with the movie people. In that way, if the movie people objected to the final product they could argue with Doubleday and not with me.

I then started to write *Fantastic Voyage II,* albeit with considerable

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T H E

TEAM SPECTRA

R E P O R T

We probably shouldn't be telling you this, but when we acquired Richard Grant's novel **Rumors of Spring** (then called **Prelude and Forest**), we didn't really have any idea what it was about. But the fact was that the hundred or so sample pages which came from Richard's agent were so brilliantly written that we knew we needed to have this rare, wonderful talent on the Spectra list. So we signed it up and then called Richard to ask him if he could tell us where all of these incredible sentences were leading.

They certainly were leading somewhere. And when the final manuscript for **Rumors of Spring** came in, it was humming with energy and the story line became not only cohesive, but utterly enthralling. The tale of the crusade of a band of unlikely allies to the last rebellious forest on Earth, it is the kind of warm, intelligent, totally absorbing fantasy novel one sees all too infrequently. We fell in love with it immediately.

Lots of other people discovered how wonderful **Rumors of Spring** was when we published it in hardcover and trade paperback last year. The *Los Angeles Daily News* called it "a rare and marvelous tale." The *San Francisco Examiner* said it was "wry, hilarious and humane...a joy." The *Austin American-Statesman* dubbed it "a warm near-future fantasy...ably demonstrates Grant's abilities in what might be called the Ray Bradbury school of fantasy," and the *Philadelphia Daily News* said "like all good myths, **Rumors of Spring** is rooted in a rich soil of realism. It is a wise and compassionate tale." The *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* simply called it "delightful." And *Fantasy Review* really caught the essence of the reading experience when it said, "Richard Grant's prose is such that I kept stopping to think over an idea, or reread a certain turn of phrase or bit of description, simply because it was so good. If you enjoyed the way John Crowley pulled so many diverse elements so seamlessly together in **Little, Big**, then this book is for you."

You might be familiar with Richard Grant from his first novel, **Saraband of Lost Time**, which was the runner-up for the Philip K. Dick Award. But whether you've read him before or not, do yourself the favor of reading **Rumors of Spring**. It's a simply extraordinary experience.

Enjoy,
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trepidation, for I had handicapped myself considerably.

I could not use two submarines, one American, one Soviet. I could not use the suspense that would be evolved in a kind of war within the bloodstream. I could not use any of the scenes or situations the other writer had so expertly handled. I had to make up something completely different.

So I did. There was only one ship involved (a Soviet ship) and on it were a crew of five, four Soviets and one American. There was conflict and Soviet-American antagonism, yes, but it was on a much more subtle level than the firing of guns. And the resolution was, to my own way of thinking, absolutely terrific.

I handed it in once it was done, and my Doubleday editors praised it unstintingly. That pleased me, but didn't surprise me. The Doubleday editors always praise my stuff. What did surprise me, however, was that the movie people liked it, too. I would have given rather high odds that they would be outraged.

This doesn't mean there will necessarily be a movie, of course. A lot of money would have to be raised to take care of the special effects and that might not be forthcoming. Then, too, another movie has just appeared called *Innerspace* which, I'm told, deals with miniaturized human beings in a bloodstream (I haven't seen it) and that might discourage our movie people from attempting another.

However, that's as may be. I'm a book person and if the book does well, I'll bear up under other-media disappointments. So far (a month before publication as I write this) the book seems to be doing well. It has sold to Great Britain, Germany, Spain, Italy, Japan, and maybe some other countries. In fact, I received an advance copy of the British edition of *Fantastic Voyage II* before I ever saw a copy of Doubleday's American edition. What's more, *Publishers Weekly* has already gone on record as thinking the book is very good (I must admit that some reviewers can tell a hawk from a handsaw).

In a way, what pleases me most is that Bantam has bought the paperback rights to *Fantastic Voyage II* for a higher advance than I have ever yet received for any paperback sale. (Remembering the $5000 flat fee I got for the first book, the new advance is doubly sweet.) What's more, I think they are planning to put out a new edition of *Fantastic Voyage I,* hoping that it will ride the back of the new book.

Of course, I won't say a thing till I see how everything goes. Still, *if* the paperback version of *Fantastic Voyage II* (to be published in the fall of 1988, I suppose) goes well and drags along *Fantastic Voyage I* with it, I may point out to Bantam that another free-will addition to the flat sum I was paid for the earlier book might be in order. ●

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LETTERS

Dear Sheila;

The following for the letter column, if that's okay. It should be self explanatory:

I don't believe it is usually good form to answer letters in regard to my fiction or criticism, and I don't intend to start making a practice of it, but Joseph A. Huycke's letter in the August issue so misrepresents what I actually said in "Science Fiction versus Sci-Fi" that I feel I should make an exception in this case to clarify the record.

Mr. Huycke quotes me as writing "Sci-Fi . . . has long since become the media's fave label denoting . . . those books festooned with rocketships and BEMs . . . and of course 'sci-fi movies' ranging from *2001* to *King Kong vs. Godzilla.*" He then goes on to berate me for placing *2001* "in the same class as pulp literature or 'pulp' movies." And then goes on with a detailed defense of *2001* as art.

Ye gods, Mr. Huycke, can't you even read the quote you extracted from context? I did not equate *2001* with *King Kong versus Godzilla* therein, I bemoaned the fact that the labeling of all science fiction—pulp crud and high art alike—as "sci-fi" by the media results in the unfortunate fact that *the general public* perceives *2001* and *King Kong versus Godzilla* as the same thing!

While I may not share Mr. Huycke's unreserved high opinion of the Kubrick film, I certainly respect it as an ambitious work of cinematic art. If *I'm* "off my nut" about this, then so is he, because he's essentially *agreeing* with what I said.

Learn to *read,* Mr. Huycke, learn to read!

Norman Spinrad
Los Angeles, CA

That's one thing about us science fiction writers. Boy, are we articulate!

—Isaac Asimov

Dear Dr. Issac Asimov,

I am writing to tell you how much I enjoyed Norman Spinrad's article, "The Edge of the Envelope," in the July issue of *IAsfm.* I don't consider myself a particularly literary person, but I love to read. I love the written word. It's beautiful to me even if some of the more obscure symbolisms or finer meanings escape me at first reading. However, I was always curious why some wonderful books were totally ignored by the science fiction "element" when it came to reviews, award nominations, or just

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acknowledging their presence. Now I have a better idea why. I had never heard the terms "Latin American magic realism" or "surrealism" applied to writing before (well, perhaps surrealism). I just assumed I was missing some deep and profound point/difference along the way. To me, I guess, it was just a matter of style, but it did not prevent me from reading Walker Percy's *Love in the Ruins,* Gabriel Garcia Marquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude,* Anthony Burgess' *The End of the World News,* or *Easy Travel to Other Planets,* which I loved and, heaven help me, can't remember the author's name.

Science fiction is great fun to me and a wonderful source of relaxation, but it has its serious side, too. It takes ordinary people and puts them in extraordinary situations, shows the human condition in ways that transcend the humdrum of every day, shows us to be miracles of creation on one hand and creatures of the dark on the other in ways that SOME mainstream fiction can't do. It shows the POSSIBILITIES, I guess, warns us, too. In other words, I think good ol' sci-fi has been given a bum rap, nothing new there, unfortunately.

So, tho' I know there are differences, I suppose I'm inclined to put science fiction into the same category as the aforementioned books, "surrealism" or "Latin American magic realism" notwithstanding. I get very irritated when I read letters by sci-fi fans whining ". . . but that's not science fiction." It seems the longer there is closed-mindedness in THAT sector, the longer it will take the "mainstream" to give science fiction its long awaited due. Besides, that attitude prevents certain fans from reading some truly wonderful books they would enjoy (maybe).

Thank you, again, for the article. I've been waiting to read such a one for a long, long time. I enjoy your magazine and look forward to it each month. I share your concern for our future.

Margaret Ranson
New Orleans, LA

PS: I see that New Orleans is going to host the world "con" in '88. I hope you and many others will be there. "The city that care forgot" is bound to put on one of the best!!! I'm looking forward to it, anyway. The last one I went to was ten years ago and a dwarf in blue satin with white fur boots kept chasing me around and giving me some kind of roman salute. I haven't been to one since.

I don't think we'll ever get science fiction fans to agree on exactly what is SF and what isn't; and perhaps that's good. It shows our field to be broad, vigorous, and variegated. Something that is too easily categorized may be too nearly dead. Incidentally, many letters are addressed to me with my first name misspelled. I know that "Isaac" is not a common name, but it has one *"s" and* two *"a"s. I grow weary over having that reversed.*

—Isaac Asimov

Dear Dr. Asimov:

Concerning your Editorial in the August *IAsfm:*

The reader who wrote about writing stories ". . . defending our way of life throughout the Galaxy" was not, I hope, planning to defend

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every aspect of it, was he?

There are some very questionable aspects to our way of life! And to insist on defending them throughout the Galaxy would be the utmost folly.

Thinking of only one of these—the American Way of Disposing of Waste—would suggest that the reader is planning to write about how American patriotism made a garbage dump of the entire Galaxy.

Individually, we want to preserve our right to dispose of our beer cans or soda bottles by merely tossing them out the car window. As United States citizens, we want to preserve our right to send our acid rain to Canada. As Americans, the Mexicans want to preserve the right to send their waste into the United States in the waters of a river. The Russians aren't American, they don't even have a democratic form of government, but they want to preserve the right to send the radioactive results of a nuclear accident throughout the surrounding countries.

Isn't it about time *somebody* gave up his provincialism (rephrase that—Isn't it about time *everybody* . . .) in order to assure that there will be something left to preserve!?

We must each put a LOT more thought into how our actions will affect not just our own neighborhood, but the entire planet!—all the way from the farmer indiscriminately applying insecticides to his crops to the great concern for the Earth's ozone layer!

If we try to preserve the American Way of Life, we may find that *there is no* Earth Way of Life, including an American Way of Life!

We must change! But there is a distinct difference between the United States *changing* and the United States going through *decay and disintegration.* Let him write stories not about ". . . defending our way of life throughout the Galaxy," but rather about ". . . changing our way of life for the better throughout the Galaxy, for the betterment of the entire Galaxy—not just for the betterment of the Terran Federation, much less merely for the United States of America."

Earnestly,

Neal H. Krape
York, PA

There's lots of this thoughtlessness within a country. New Jersey beaches were recently closed because of a tide of illegally-dumped garbage bearing down upon them. There is no doubt that the garbage was of American origin. Everybody is fouling his neighbor's nest and his own, too. And even if we stow our rubbish carefully in designated places, we are running out of other places to put them in. Remember that barge that wandered all over the Atlantic Ocean?

—Isaac Asimov

Dear Isaac and Co.,

Somehow, I always figured that my first letter to *IAsfm* would be a dazzling critique of one of the many stories that appear in your magazine, or a profound argument concerning one of the lively debates that seem to be a regular feature.

Alas, I have nothing profound or truly intelligent to say. This is primarily a love letter. I love receiv-

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ing your magazine in the mail. I love to dive into the huge variety of stories and poetry. And I love to take it to bed with me, even more than my favorite stuffed animal. (What did you think I was going to say?!)

IAsfm is the only magazine I read from cover to cover. I think that says a lot, not only for the quality of the stories and poetry, but also for the regular features and columns, including the "Letters" section. You seem to cultivate a particularly intelligent readership (if I do say so myself!) and the letters are almost as much fun to read as the stories.

And, of course, I always enjoy your editorials. I can't say I precisely agree with everything you say, but you demonstrate a genuine respect and appreciation for the opinions of others, which *I* appreciate.

I would also like to offer my compliments to the editorial staff, especially Gardner and Sheila, for the wonderful job they're doing. As a hopefully soon-to-be-published writer, I have developed a respect for the difficult and painstaking job facing an editor every day.

So, before I retire with my latest issue of *IAsfm,* I would like to extend my gratitude to all of you for the bedtime (and other time) reading pleasure you have given me. You can bet that as long as your magazine is around, I'll be reading it (assuming I live that long!).

So ends my midnight love letter and all the mush that goes with it. See you next month.

Good night and sweet dreams!

Jaquelyn M. Briski
Milwaukee, WI

Never mind what I thought you were going to say. I've canceled the train tickets to Wisconsin. In any case, I'm glad to receive love letters of this kind. Thank you.

—Isaac Asimov

Dear Good Doctor, Gardner, Sheila, et al.

Just received my September issue (and most thankfully—having had nothing of value to read, SF wise). Felt I had to write a letter protesting your Letters feature. After wading through two critiques of critiques, I find myself coming to the conclusion that your Letters section is being used as some sort of pen pal club for would-be writers. Y'know, guys, this space *could* be used for more science fiction, instead of being utilized as a vehicle for mutual masturbation by these "intellectuals" and "former beauty queens." Jeez . . . WHO CARES? If these guys want to get published, let 'em submit some stories and take their chances like the rest of us. In most, if not all cases, what they're writing about is something that was pertinent to an issue that appeared *seven months ago* . . . (yawn).

I am willing to bet that if you took a reader poll on this, you'd find that most of the readers would agree with me. You may consider that a challenge!

We don't need a section in the magazine to "ego stroke" the also-rans and wanna-bes. We can, however, always use more of your excellent science fiction. . . . Just as a digression here, I've been deliriously happy with the quality of your stories since Gardner came

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Janet Lee-Bock
Lakehurst, NJ

We try to pick interesting letters and they do give the readers a chance to interact and express their views. If there should be an unmistakable demand from large numbers that we stop printing letters, we might be tempted to do so, but I can't help but think that a majority views them with at least an amused toleration. As for Gardner, we'll give him anything reasonable *that he wants.*

—Isaac Asimov

Dear Dr. Asimov, et al.:

Let me congratulate you, a little belatedly, on reaching your tenth anniversary (April 1987). As you rightly point out this is no small accomplishment in today's magazine market.

As you did when you celebrated your hundredth issue (January 1986), you have fixed upon *Galaxy*, started in 1950, as the last magazine founded to reach either of these milestones. For the sake of accuracy I must point out that two magazines founded in 1952 more than exceeded both of them.

If, Worlds of Science Fiction (first issue: March 1952) published 175 issues before being merged with *Galaxy* after its December 1974 issue.

Fantastic (first issue: Summer 1952) produced 208 issues before it, too, was merged with a sister publication, *Amazing Stories*, following its October 1980 issue.

This in no way detracts from your own accomplishments. What I do find disappointing is that no one wrote in to correct you the first time you made this claim. Fandom is not what it used to be.
Sincerely,

Ken Johnson
Cambridge, MA

You are right. I tend to overlook "sister magazines" and I shouldn't have. However, we are approaching the 130th issue now and, if we are still around in 1995, we will have surpassed both these magazines.

—Isaac Asimov

Dear Mr. Asimov,

I enjoyed your editorial on unification in the August issue, and I felt a need to add a few observations to your views.

If the world had a centralized government, its citizens would not be any less American or British or Chinese or Russian, just as being an American citizen does not make me any less a representative of the state of Hawaii. Being a part of a greater whole does not diminish the individual identity of every human being.

There are those who say that progress destroys the cultures of the Earth, and often in the past this has been true when unenlightened masses suppressed whatever they feared or could not understand. However, in these days of increasing social awareness, more people than ever are working to preserve all that is good in the heritages of our ancestors. Whether we be Hawaiian or Cherokee or Scottish or African, we each have

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a statement to make. Each of us has a unique cultural background which contributes something of value to those around us. So, while we move toward unity of purpose and a centralized world government, at the same time we must make a concerted effort toward preserving those elements of our diverse histories which brought us to where we are today. If a tapestry is woven of only one color or texture, the pattern of that tapestry will be lost. So it is with the world, with the universe. All the various elements which go to make up our existence are important, no matter how small. How much more beautiful and interesting is the tapestry of many colors than that which is woven of only one hue.

For those who look upon unification with dread or uncertainty, I would say the following. First, all life is change. We cannot avoid change, but we can determine whether that change be for bad or for good. One very positive aspect of unification is that the member nations would combine their resources for the benefit of all. We could draw on the knowledge, experience and technology of every nation to seriously address such issues as world hunger, health care, and space exploration. The burden of responsibility would not be on any one nation, but on all member nations, each according to its abilities. Secondly, it is not necessary to lose one's individual identity in order to seek a greater unity. Let's not remain forever in the Dark Ages.

One day, I will be able to stand proudly with people everywhere and say, "I am Hawaiian, *and* American, *and* a citizen of the World."

Aloha,

Debra F. Sanders
Honolulu, HI

I'm with you all the way. We're talking psychology here. You are what you consider yourself to be. I was born in the Soviet Union but I've always considered myself to be an American (at least from the age of three). And, to be absolutely truthful, what I consider myself most *is a "New Yorker." I lived for twenty-one years in the Boston metropolitan area and took it for granted every day of those years that I was a New Yorker in exile.*

—Isaac Asimov

Dear Dr. Asimov,

Let me get right to the point. It took you long enough to find your way to little ol' Beaufort. I discovered your magazine only by chance when a friend who was moving brought over a bunch of ancient magazines he had bought at a library book sale. I waited before I read them, because at the time I was not attracted to short stories, but at last I had to see what they held. I was unimpressed with the first. I moved to the second, hoping it would be better, but my mood only changed a bit. By the third I was addicted to the letters column and book review, but I still had something against short stories. Well, I kept reading, and by about the fifth, which didn't really take long, I was hooked. But the magazines were all old, from the late seventies and early eighties, and

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he librarian had collected them rom some unknown source, not hrough subscription. I searched ll of Beaufort, but I found no *Asfm!* Again by chance, I was sent a magazine-selling sweepstakes, nd well, finally, I found a way to et your magazine. What's more, like the new better than the old. t has more stories and less filler naterial. And that, Good Doctor, was the point.

Anyway, now that you know where Beaufort is, maybe you could start sending your magazine to one of our three bookstores. (The place s kind of small, but being a general fiction fan I've noticed that here are more science fiction and fantasy books in all of our bookstores than any other kind of book. You might do good business here.)

Well, I've got to get to reading the latest issue. Keep up the good work, and please, think about the unhappy people of Beaufort just waiting to find a magazine to take them beyond the parameters of small town life. You could free them from a sheltered existence.

Sincerely,

Steven Wylie
Beaufort, SC

You don't know how unsettling it is to a person of my semi-mature years to be told that magazines from the late '70s and early '80s are "old" and even "ancient." We would love to send magazines to your three bookstores but the catch is that your three bookstores have to order them. You go and tell them you demand they order it and then round up some pals to buy them when the magazines do show up.

—Isaac Asimov

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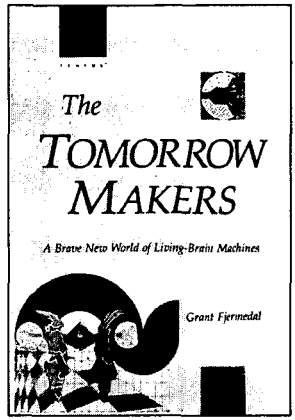

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GAMING

by Matthew J. Costell

There are those who would maintain that the ultimate marriage of game and microchip was none other than a little exercise in oral aggression called *Pac Man*.

Their reasoning (and note how well the author distances himself from such a bubble-headed view) runs thusly . . .

The computer represents a self-contained artificial world, with its own binary rules and graphic restrictions. All the many games that have followed in *Pac Man*'s footsteps (if he does indeed have feet) have sought to attain a realism that, quite simply, cannot be created. While someday simulations of breathtaking reality might be possible, through Digital Video Interactive Disks and other video-based technologies, even the best computer games offer, at most, comic book realism.

But other games have taken the computer at face value and have created new, abstract, and often bizarre games that take advantage of this graphically limited universe.

One of my favorites, in recent months, has been Firebird's *Sentry*, an odd game that takes place on ten thousand alien landscapes, where a robot attempts to get close to an ominous sentry. Energy is constantly being transformed into trees and rocks, and the game has a decidedly otherworldly feel.

But a sense of whimsy is best captured in a quartet of new releases that simulate activities which have little to do with saving worlds and conquering the universe.

Mini-Putt (Accolade, 20813 Stevens Creek Boulevard, Cupertino, CA 95014) is a thoroughly delightful game. If you're a fan of miniature golf (or even if you aren't) *Mini-Putt* is a dream come true. There are four courses, Deluxe, Traditional, Classic, and Challenge. (I bet you didn't know that there were so many kinds of mini-golf courses.)

You play by moving a cursor over your intended location, pushing a button to select the power of your swing, and releasing it when it's lined up properly. Of course, all sorts of hills, valleys, barriers, and strange obstacles can make a hash of calculated play. The Deluxe course offers a castle that swallows your ball and ejects it out of another exit. In another hole, you have to hit the ball into a cannon (which promptly fires it, sending it flying onto an elevated green).

The game keeps accurate track

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of all strokes (unlike the haphazard scoring carried out by most mini-golfers) and, best of all, the ball makes a reassuring "plop" sound when it finally tumbles into the hole.

Paper Boy (Mindscape, Inc., 3444 Dundee Road, North Brook, IL 60062) is a computer version of an arcade hit. A snotty-nosed kid pedals his bike, trying to toss his papers into his customers' boxes, while occasionally smashing the window of some non-customer. (I didn't tell my son about that way to score points, but he quickly discovered it on his own.) Meanwhile, dogs, cars, remote control toys, and irate residents of the suburban neighborhood chase the paper boy.

Deliver enough papers, and your paper boy gets an extra day and a run through an obstacle course.

Epyx (600 Galveston Drive, Redwood City, CA 94063) has released a series of sports games, all with an Olympic flavor. *Summer Games* and *Winter Games* offer the full gamut of cross-country skiing, tobogganing, diving, and weight lifting.

But they all left me rather cold. I mean, it's just another case of a bad attempt to simulate reality. But with their release of *California Games*, they have found, in my mind, the perfect marriage of sports and a computer. There's a great frisbee tossing event, and a foot bag game (you know, that sack Venice Beach people kick around with startling dexterity). Sea gulls comment on the action, and the whole series of events is very laid back, and all very amusing.

And let me not forget *GeeBee Air Rally* (Activision Inc., P.O. Box 7287, Mountain View, CA 94039).

Not a flight simulation by any stretch of the imagination, *GeeBee Air Rally* is a giddy recreation of the golden barnstorming days of a diminutive little plane that was highly maneuverable and has been described as "a pair of tiny wings attached to a fuel tank."

When you are inside a 1932 GeeBee, you can fly over, around, and under other planes, getting a real seat-of-your-pants thrill. It's a wonderful moment when you can swoop under another plane and then soar above it. Have a mid-air mishap, and you'll find yourself tumbling into some local farmer's pig sty.

While none of these games are too serious, they are all very much at home in the graphics Never-Never Land of the computer. ●

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MANY MANSIONS

by Alexander Jablokov

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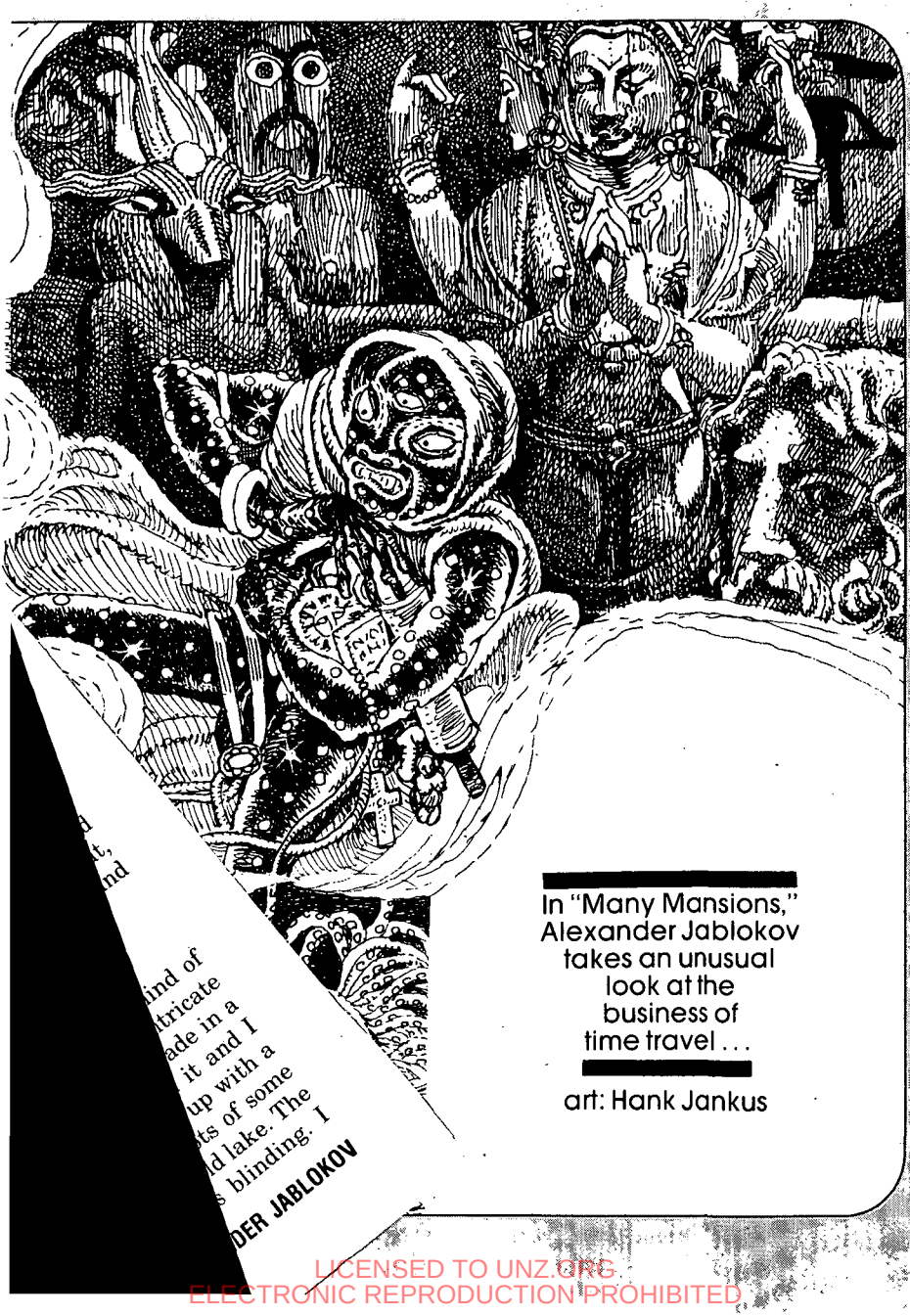

In "Many Mansions," Alexander Jablokov takes an unusual look at the business of time travel . . .

art: Hank Jankus

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The end of my vacation was announced with typical abruptness. I was in the *caldarium*, the hot pool, at the Baths of Titus, in Rome. The rotunda was lit by the afternoon sun coming through the hole in the center of the dome, and mist clung to the hot water in the pool. I relaxed, feeling nobly Roman, in one of the bathing boxes that surrounded the central water. I had a foreskin, since it would not do to be mistaken for a Jew. The fashion in male appendages varied so much according to time and place that my foreskin was attached by something approximating physiological Velcro. I had spent the day at the Forum, exchanging scandalous rumors with citizens about the Emperor Hadrian and his beloved, the boy Antinous, and what creative use they might make of the Apis bulls during their visit to Egypt, a visit that I knew, though my gossip mongers didn't, would end in Antinous's death by drowning in the Nile I had also taken a walk over to take a look at the continuing reconstruction of the Pantheon, and finished the day in one of the reading rooms of the new Ulpian Library with a few pages from Suetonius's *Lives of Famous Whores*, one of the more charming works of group biography that I've ever read. I only wished that I was allowed to have a copy made The water was searingly hot, and I was at peace, looking forward to a dinner party at the house of the irritating but entertaining poet Juvenal

"Mathias!" a thin, reedy voice exclaimed. "How at ease you look, like a chicken being poached. I envy you your serene state, so soon, alas, to end." I looked around, but there was no one close enough to hear. There never was, he planned things that way, but I always check. It makes me feel like I have some charge over things.

"Marienbad," I said. "Are you all right in there?"

"Perfectly, old friend! One branch of my phylum has disported itself for years in the hot waters of Yellowstone. We are a resilient race, remember, quite unlike your sensitive species."

Marienbad rested on the bottom of the pool of the *caldarium*. He looke like a flat fish, a ray or something, I've never quite figured out wha covered with red and green Christmas tree lights, with tentacles arou his edge. One of his many eyes rose up on a stalk and examined me.

"Your rest has done you well! Now, let us be on our way."

"Wait, Marienbad! Can't you give me just a minute to—"

It was worthless. Once he gets something into that aquatic m his, there's nothing I can do about it. The Baths, with their i tiling, statues, and spouting dolphins disappeared, like a slow f movie. The hot water, unfortunately, disappeared along with found myself with my bare ass resting in ice water. I jumped shriek, and leaped up out of the water onto the twisted ro huge coniferous tree. I now shivered on the edge of a clear co bright light of day, after the darkness of the Baths, wa

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squinted. In the distance, across the water, were what looked like icy peaks, gleaming in the sun. A fish broke the water and a biting wind did its best to freeze me solid.

"Marienbad!" I yelled. "Where the hell am I? Why do you do this to me?"

There was a stirring in the water beneath the roots, and Marienbad appeared on the sand, about three feet below the surface. "Is it not beautiful? This is what your geologists have called Lake Athabasca, someday to become Lake Michigan. The glaciers have retreated, but the escape of melt waters is blocked to the south by the terminal moraine. Excuse me a moment." He vanished into the deeper water.

I looked toward what I had thought were mountains: a mile high continental ice sheet. Marienbad had dropped me in the middle of the Wurm glaciation totally naked. So there was a wormhole between Rome in 130 CE and northern Illinois in 10,000 BCE. The memory modifications I had gotten from my employment by Marienbad made sure that I would remember that fact, along with everything else, including the other two thousand or so wormholes already in my memory. The space-time matrix around Earth was so lousy with them that the more I learned about them the more surprised I was that anyone managed to stay in his own time and place for more than a couple of days. I wrapped my arms around myself and curled into a ball. It didn't help. The wind sliced through me like a cleaver through calf's liver.

Marienbad reappeared, a wriggling fish in his tentacles. He proceeded to bite its head off. "Ah, delicious. Are you more alert now, old friend?"

"Alert?" I talked through chattering teeth. "In a very few moments, I will be dead."

"Mathias, you are forever difficult, and have no faith in me. Did I not hire you from your tedious archivist's post and give you the run of the centuries? Do I not defend your interests at all times, keeping various of my colleagues from eating you, or stuffing you for their collections? Do I not—"

"Get to the point, dammit !" I screamed.

"All right, all right. Behind the tree, with the rucksack. No faith. He has no faith."

I crawled around to the other side of the tree, my limbs already numb. Piled over the rucksack was a huge fur robe, large enough for the Jolly Green Giant, with the fur on the inside. I crawled in, wrapped it tightly around me, and just lay there for about ten minutes, shaking desperately, until I felt warm again. I poked my head out. One of Marienbad's eyes was looking at me. "Are you now prepared for converse?" he said, in a coldly annoyed voice.

"Yes. Now that I have at least some chance of surviving to the end of

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the conversation, we can talk." I looked at the fur I had wrapped around me and wondered what manner of beast it had come from. It was very rough. A giant ground sloth? A saber-toothed cat? Maybe a young woolly mammoth. I didn't even want to think about what manner of being that huge robe had been made for. The different millennia of Earth's history, as I had gradually found out during the course of my employment with Marienbad, played host to some four dozen species of aliens from all the planets of the Galaxy, and most of them were quite unpleasant.

"I have a job for you, Mathias Pomeranz." I hate it when he uses my full name. That means that he is acting in his official capacity as my superior officer in the Transtemporal Constabulary. "I must use your remarkable skills to track down a desperate criminal. His name is Kinbarn, and his place of origin is a planet that circles the star you know as Deneb."

"What has he done?"

"He is a dangerous addict, with a most reprehensible stimulation habit."

"And what might that be?"

"Religious revelation. Extreme caution is advised."

I slogged up the mud hill with the rest of the pilgrims. It was raining. It always rains in the Ile de France during April, even in 1227 CE. That's what makes it so green in May. But it wasn't May. It was April. My felt hat was soaked through, and my cloak was about to be. My feet sloshed in my shoes, which in turn sucked in and out of the mud with every step. I occasionally lost a shoe in the mud and had to go back for it. The wet wood of my staff was rubbing my hands raw. My vacation was over, and I was back at work.

By evening, the rain had stopped, and we had reached the town of Chartres. The towers of the cathedral caught the last rays of the sunset. It was the hour of Vespers, and from within came the sound of plainsong, and the bells rang out over the countryside. We made it in for the chanting of the Magnificat. The cathedral was dramatic in the dying light of the late afternoon, as the torches were being lit, but we were herded out rather briskly once the altar had been censed and the service was over. In the Middle Ages, pilgrims like us were treated basically as tourists with no money, the lowest of the low. We would have to wait until tomorrow to see anything.

With the disappearance of the sun it had become cold. I led the way to the pilgrim's hostel on the edge of town. There, we were all given a watery barley stew and some not overly clean straw to sleep in. I had done better, in my time, but I had also done considerably worse. The one night I had spent at Versailles, in 1672, for example, had been in a

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disgusting room near the only privy in that wing of the palace, and even the privilege of seeing Louis the Sun King eat his lunch had not really made up for it. Several of my fellow pilgrims and I shared the sour wine in our leather flasks, swapped dirty stories, and went to sleep, near enough to each other for our fleas to compare notes on accommodations.

When I came awake, at about three in the morning, according to my internal clock, it was silent, except for the snores. With the torches out, the inside of the hostel was so dark that for a moment I wasn't sure if I'd actually succeeded in opening my eyes. I tripped over sleeping bodies all the way to the door.

Marienbad hadn't been able to give me much. He never does. It's always a hint, a clue, a rumor. It's no way to run a law enforcement agency, as I'd told him any number of times, but then the laws we were enforcing tended to be vague and obscure themselves. Half a million years of an entire planet's history is a hell of a jurisdiction. My lead, for what it was worth, was that Kinbarn the Denebian was known to have been in the vicinity of Chartres in the spring of 1227. Marienbad had even managed to rustle up a photograph of my quarry, along with some vital statistics. Kinbarn was about four feet high, had shiny black skin, like lacquer, and was covered head to foot with flecks of what looked like diamonds. His eyes, three of them, flickered with their own light and resembled fire opals. He smelled like the oil of bitter almonds, or perhaps like cyanide, depending on which way your fancy runs. He seemed to have no distinguishing marks or scars.

The night was cold enough for frost, and the grass crunched beneath my feet. My still damp clothes began to freeze. I was starting to give up on the idea of ever being warm again. There was a half moon in the sky, which provided enough light through the clouds for me to see my way to the cathedral. It was so silent that the sudden hoot of a owl in pursuit of a mouse somewhere out in the fields made me jump a foot in the air. The towers of the cathedral loomed above me.

The main difference between this thirteenth century Notre Dame de Chartres and the one I'd visited as a tourist in the twentieth century was the north tower. From what I could see in the moonlight, it was a permanent looking structure of wood. It would have to wait another three hundred years before it was replaced by the stone Gothic Flamboyant tower I remembered.

I made my way around to the south side of the cathedral. Much of Chartres had burned down in a disastrous fire some forty years before. Even with the enthusiastic assistance of workers from all over France, which included great lords and ladies pulling wagons of stone from the quarries, it still took a long time to build a Gothic cathedral, and the southern part was still under construction. I checked, reflexively, for

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guards, but there didn't seem to be anyone around. Chartres was miles from a city of any size, and daring midnight thefts of half ton chunks of dressed stone were apparently not considered a serious risk. Somewhere, in the village of the hundreds of workers who still labored on the cathedral, master masons slept, dreaming of making heavy rock fly. I hoped none of them were dedicated enough to sleep on the construction site.

I looked up at the south transept. Lashed-together poles made up the scaffolding, and several ladders consisting of a single pole with pegs stuck through it leaned against the wall. A couple of windlasses stood at the top of the wall, their dangling ropes making them look like gibbets in the moonlight. I grabbed a ladder and started climbing.

The south porch, with its triple doorway, was well along to being carved, and the lower stained glass windows were in place. Where the upper ones would be, eventually, on either side of the rose window, were blind, staring holes. Climbing the ladder was, because of the central pole, like riding a barrel in a fast flowing river. When I made it up to the window opening, I was shaking. I looked in. The feel of the hard marble floor far below pressed cold on my forehead, even though I couldn't see it. I poked my foot in experimentally, but couldn't find any support. I sat down, half in and half out, and thought about going back to bed. If it had been silk sheets and a fire in a palace in Provence, I might have done it. Unfortunately, the thought of rough straw reinforced my sense of duty. I didn't want to walk into that cathedral unprepared the next morning.

I climbed up farther, to the windlass, and pulled out its rope. It was heavy, and friendly as a python. It tried to pull me off my precarious ledge down to the ground, and, before I finally managed to wrestle it down to the window, it almost succeeded. I tied it down and threw the other end down into the darkness. There was no sound of its hitting the floor. I didn't stop to consider things any further, because I knew that if I did, I would just give up, straw or no straw, so I just started climbing down. When I reached the end of the rope I held on and lowered myself, feeling with my feet. I was just about to confront the possibility of having to let myself drop toward a floor an unknown distance below when my searching toes finally touched, and I let out a breath I hadn't known I'd been holding.

I began to pussyfoot around the nave. Above me were the famous stained glass windows of Chartres, newly installed and undimmed by the corruptions of time, but I couldn't see a damn thing. It was just as dark as it had been in the hostel. It is testimony to the perseverance and energy of humanity that anyone ever managed to commit crimes at night before Edison. It was too dark to do anything but sleep. A noise, somewhere, made me turn quickly. A pillar that had crept up behind me,

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waiting for that very moment, smashed me on the side of the head and knocked me to the floor with a nice, furtive crash. I lay there, cursing myself for an idiot, when I saw two torches bobbing along the west end of the nave. I took a second to pull my shoes off, then came to my feet and zeroed in on them like a moth. The stone floor was cold. Of course.

I snuck up close enough to see, then hid behind a pillar. If anyone had been looking for me, I would have been spotted immediately, but no one was looking for someone prowling around the cathedral in the small hours of the morning. The man in front wore fancy robes, and a big gold pectoral cross, and looked to be the Bishop of Chartres himself, though he wasn't wearing a mitre or carrying a crozier to make him easier for me to identify him, which was slightly inconsiderate. In paintings, bishops always wear mitres and carry croziers, so that you can tell them from the princes and the angels.

The Bishop wasn't wandering around his cathedral in the middle of the night just to make sure all the doors were locked. He walked like a man with business to attend to, night business. His face was intent. Behind him walked a bent old priest, in a simple cassock, looking, with his long white hair and beard, like a recently converted Druid. The cross around his neck was made of wood, on a leather string.

The Bishop pulled a large key from his robes and unlocked a door. The heavy metal mechanism of the lock clattered like a machine shop. The door opened on a set of stairs which, from their position, must have led to the north tower, the wooden one. I mentally flipped a coin, ignored the way it fell, and followed them through. The addition of my stealthy bare footsteps was inaudible above the clatter of the loose wooden stairs. I did get a couple of splinters in my feet.

The Bishop unlocked a second door and they entered a small room. I knelt on the stairs and peeked in, ready to run for it if anyone spotted me. Sure. I could tumble down the stairs and run frantically around the pitch black cathedral, pursued by priests who were intimately familiar with every corner of it, and finally play a game of hide-and-seek among the bones in the crypt. That was just what I needed to get my blood flowing. All I could really do was hope that they wouldn't see me in the first place.

The room was set up as a monk's cell, but like that of a monk who was a scion of a noble house. A straw pallet with a linen cover lay in a corner. A cross hung on the wall. An ornate illuminated Bible lay open on one small table, a missal, also illuminated, on another. Their rich colors and gold leaf gleamed in the torchlight. The little room, which must have been right under the octagonal roof of the spire, had windows, but instead of being covered with oilcloth, or shutters, as I would have expected, they were filled with small panels of stained glass. Even granted that this

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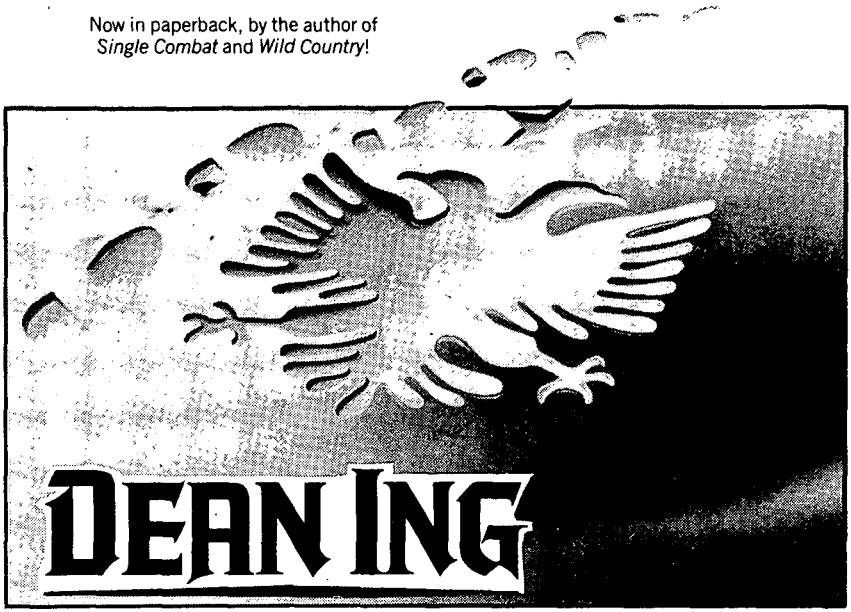

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tower was going to last until the end of the fifteenth century, which still made it "temporary" by medieval standards, it was strange that someone had bothered to put stained glass in this little private room while the rest of the cathedral was far from finished.

The Bishop took the cross off the wall and brought it into the circle of torchlight. It gleamed, and he seemed to have trouble holding it. I wasn't surprised. It looked as if it was made of solid gold, encrusted with jewels.

"He's left us, Martin," the Bishop said, sadly, looking at the cross. He set it down on the table, which rocked with the added weight. He was a straight-backed, serious-faced man with a long curling beard, filled with gray. "Just as he was ready to take holy vows, at last."

"He wasn't ready," the priest, Martin, said flatly. "He will never be ready."

"A harsh judgment."

"The duties of the priesthood are severe, my lord. And the vows are hard. Chastity," a smile creased his face, "would have been easy enough for him. Poverty was perhaps more difficult. Obedience was much too easy for him."

"He was so fervent! More than once I had to restrain him, lest he harm himself in his devotions, with vigils, fasts, and self-mortifications. He prayed and saw visions. He may have looked like an imp of Satan—"

"Which perhaps he was. We would have had much trouble with the Inquisition on his account. But obedience, as I said, was too easy. He drank thirstily of the faith, like a drunkard pulling at a wineskin. And now that the wineskin is empty, he has thrown it aside. When morning comes, he will piss it away."

"Martin!" the Bishop, even obviously familiar with the blunt honesty of his colleague, looked shocked.

Martin was not deterred. "He was as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal, for he was without charity. I don't know by what means he came to us. . . ."

"And you won't, Martin. It is not for you to know."

". . . or where he went. These may well be secrets beyond me. But I know when he found the Word wanting. The Word is never wanting. Only we men are."

It was interesting that the priest Martin saw right through Kinbarn's deceptions, whereas the Bishop was entirely taken in. High ecclesiastics often think they're smarter than they actually are. All that incense, I think. Kinbarn was clever, as addicts often are, and could convince almost anyone to supply him with what he needed, since most like to share their faith. It was a rare man, like Martin, who could distinguish between love and need.

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"I fear for you," Martin said suddenly. The Bishop looked up from his brooding. "You have strange . . . ambitions. Perhaps, as you say, they are not for me to know, and perhaps they are, as I know you, all in the cause of the Faith. But they are dangerous."

The Bishop smiled gently, though I could see that Martin's direct statement had disturbed him. What, in fact, did our Bishop have to do with Denebian religion addicts running about through Time? He was obviously not wholly innocent. "You put up with much for my sake, Martin, and I am grateful. But the ways of God are more mysterious than we can imagine. I hope he can find his way." He sighed. "Let us say a prayer for him, Martin. And light a candle for St. Josaphat."

"St. Josaphat? A most minor saint."

"And, as such, greater than you or I, Martin. Light a candle to light his way." He paused. "I will leave on a journey tomorrow. It should not take long."

Martin shook his head. "These matters are dark."

"That may be. But we must not shrink from them on that account. It is late."

That was my cue. I retreated down the stairs before them. This was a disappointment. Kinbarn had been here, as I was told, but he was gone. I mentally reviewed the wormholes in the vicinity, to see if I could guess his destination. Wormholes are literally that, the tracks of Hoontre, hyperdimensional worms that seem to find the space-time matrix around Earth particularly delicious. It took some effort to get my mind, modified by Marienbad, to work properly. First I remembered, in excruciating detail, the geography of the island of Naxos in the III century BCE, a place I had never been. Then I found myself repeating the king lists of Lagash and Ur. My brain was like a dusty, junk-filled attic. Finally I was able to narrow the wormhole possibilities down to seven: Oklahoma, 1921; Manchuria, 406; Egypt, 1337 BCE; Ceylon, 810; Sicily, 478 BCE; a hundred miles north of the Aral Sea, 9565 BCE; and the bottom of the ocean off Hawaii, 1991. I eliminated the last possibility, which left only six.

I needed more information. The Bishop, I decided, could bear a little interrogation. In the morning. Just then I had to sleep. It took me a damn long time to find the rope.

The cathedral was awe-inspiring in the daylight. The stained glass windows glowed with their rainbow of colors, brought out best by the diffuse light of the cloudy sky, and the roof vaulted high overhead. My group of pilgrims was taken in hand by a man named Brother Benedict, who turned out to be an accomplished tour guide. He pointed out bits of grotesque carving which might otherwise have gone unnoticed, and gave

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a lively account of the various miracles the Virgin had performed here over the centuries. The climax of the tour was the actual Tunic of the Virgin Mary, the relic which was the original reason for the cathedral's existence. It lay in an ornately decorated reliquary, behind a thick sheet of glass. I moved forward with the rest of the pilgrims to kiss it. When it came to be my turn I leaned forward—and stared. After the fire that had virtually destroyed the cathedral, the Tunic had been feared lost. Someone had finally pulled it out from under a pile of rubble, miraculously undamaged, except for a slight scorching. I could see the little bits of melted thread where the cloth had been burned. I turned away, alarm bells ringing in my head. Things were becoming more serious than I had been led to expect. A relic such as an authentic Tunic worn by the Blessed Virgin Mary 1200 years ago in Palestine had to be a pious fake, but I doubted, somehow, that such a fake would, in the thirteenth century, be made out of what was obviously polyester.

Then I spotted the Bishop. He wore a traveling cloak, and boots, and would not have been recognizable as the Bishop if I had not seen him in the uniform of his office the previous night. He stood with his legs apart and his hands clasped behind his back, looking up at the construction of the north transept. He looked like a lord looking over his domain. I slipped the chain of Brother Benedict's discourse and headed toward him.

He tried to ignore me. Pilgrims were a sou a dozen, and known to be morally lax besides. And while bathing was not a popular activity of the century, pilgrims did not wear perfume. I had considered and discarded a dozen methods of approach, and finally settled on the one that had been the most successful over the years, the approach direct.

"My Lord Bishop," I said, in a conspiratorial tone. "There has been a difficulty with the Denebian."

"The what?" His brows came together and he started to look angry. "I have no idea of what you are saying." He raised his hand and made a gesture in the air. I noted it, and memorized it, but it had no conventional Christian meaning that I could remember. Time is full of such secrets.

"We have no time to waste!" I hissed. "I mean this one." I showed him the picture. It was a clever little thing, done by some agency of Marienbad's to which I have no personal access, a photograph of Kinbarn, altered to resemble a small painting in egg tempera, complete with brushstrokes and an accidental thumbprint in the left hand corner.

He made the gesture again. He seemed to be expecting a response, so I repeated his gesture back to him.

It was apparently a gesture reserved for the use of church officials of the rank of apostolic prothonotary and above, because his face turned red and his hands began to shake as he worked himself up into a towering

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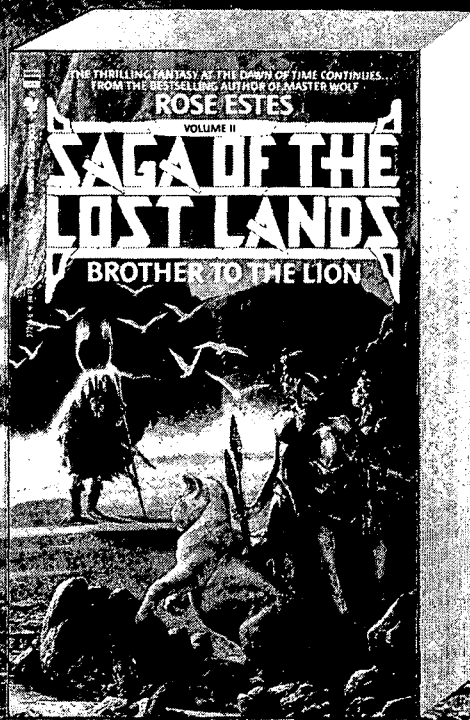

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rage. "I was warned of you, but I did not believe that such men could exist. Panderers, heretics, simoniacs, who would sell the Word of God—"

What was he talking about? "My Lord Bishop, I assure you—"

"No! The Truth is not to be sold to the highest bidder. My men will take care of you." He drew in a breath that, when expelled, would call a dozen priests and deacons down on my head, most likely to haul me off and throw me in chains.

"How dare you interfere with the business of a papal legate?" I said in a rage. The Bishop's eyes went round, and he let his breath out without a call for assistance. Before he could consider the improbability of a papal legate, usually of the rank of cardinal, and accompanied by a substantial entourage, showing up at his cathedral in the garb of a mendicant pilgrim, I forged on. "Our Pope, Gregory IX, has established a Court of the Inquisition to combat heresy. You, my dear Bishop, are obviously no common heretic, for you consort . . . with *demons*." I let my voice grow hushed with doom, and made the sign of the cross, as if unconsciously. He also crossed himself, shaking slightly, though this time with fear. I'd hit pay dirt. It was impossible to deal with a three-eyed four foot high black alien covered with diamonds and not suspect some demonic connection. The Bishop's own worries about the state of his own soul kept him from considering the flimsiness of my position. I had to move quickly, because I knew this situation could not last for very long.

"He . . . he is not a demon," the Bishop said, finally. "He is a true Christian—"

"Let me be the judge of that! Where is he? Now!" I also let my voice take on an ominous Italian accent, useful for dealing with a French Bishop.

The Bishop paused, obviously unable to decide what to tell this supposed papal legate, who would certainly know nothing about wormholes and time travel.

"The place, my lord Bishop. And the century." I laughed at his look of amazement. "Surely you do not believe yourself in possession of information unavailable to the Holy Mother Church? My, you are certainly a mass of doctrinal errors. The south of your country has been purged of the Albigensians. We destroyed Toulouse, and put the inhabitants to the sword. They were unwise. Perhaps it is now the turn of the north . . ." I was really getting to enjoy this. My Italian accent had become as thick as lasagna. The Bishop was white. "Tell me where he is! If I find him, I think I can forgive your excessive enthusiasm. If not, I will be forced to take . . . measures."

He crossed himself, slowly. "Akhetaten. The Horizon of the Sun God. In the year—"

"One thousand three hundred thirty-seven years before the birth of

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of all strokes (unlike the haphazard scoring carried out by most mini-golfers) and, best of all, the ball makes a reassuring "plop" sound when it finally tumbles into the hole.

Paper Boy (Mindscape, Inc., 3444 Dundee Road, North Brook, IL 60062) is a computer version of an arcade hit. A snotty-nosed kid pedals his bike, trying to toss his papers into his customers' boxes, while occasionally smashing the window of some non-customer. (I didn't tell my son about that way to score points, but he quickly discovered it on his own.) Meanwhile, dogs, cars, remote control toys, and irate residents of the suburban neighborhood chase the paper boy.

Deliver enough papers, and your paper boy gets an extra day and a run through an obstacle course.

Epyx (600 Galveston Drive, Redwood City, CA 94063) has released a series of sports games, all with an Olympic flavor. *Summer Games* and *Winter Games* offer the full gamut of cross-country skiing, tobogganing, diving, and weight lifting.

But they all left me rather cold. I mean, it's just another case of a bad attempt to simulate reality. But with their release of *California Games,* they have found, in my mind, the perfect marriage of sports and a computer. There's a great frisbee tossing event, and a foot bag game (you know, that sack Venice Beach people kick around with startling dexterity). Sea gulls comment on the action, and the whole series of events is very laid back, and all very amusing.

And let me not forget *GeeBee Air Rally* (Activision Inc., P.O. Box 7287, Mountain View, CA 94039).

Not a flight simulation by any stretch of the imagination, *GeeBee Air Rally* is a giddy recreation of the golden barnstorming days of a diminutive little plane that was highly maneuverable and has been described as "a pair of tiny wings attached to a fuel tank."

When you are inside a 1932 GeeBee, you can fly over, around, and under other planes, getting a real seat-of-your-pants thrill. It's a wonderful moment when you can swoop under another plane and then soar above it. Have a mid-air mishap, and you'll find yourself tumbling into some local farmer's pig sty.

While none of these games are too serious, they are all very much at home in the graphics Never-Never Land of the computer. ●

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MANY MANSIONS

by Alexander Jablokov

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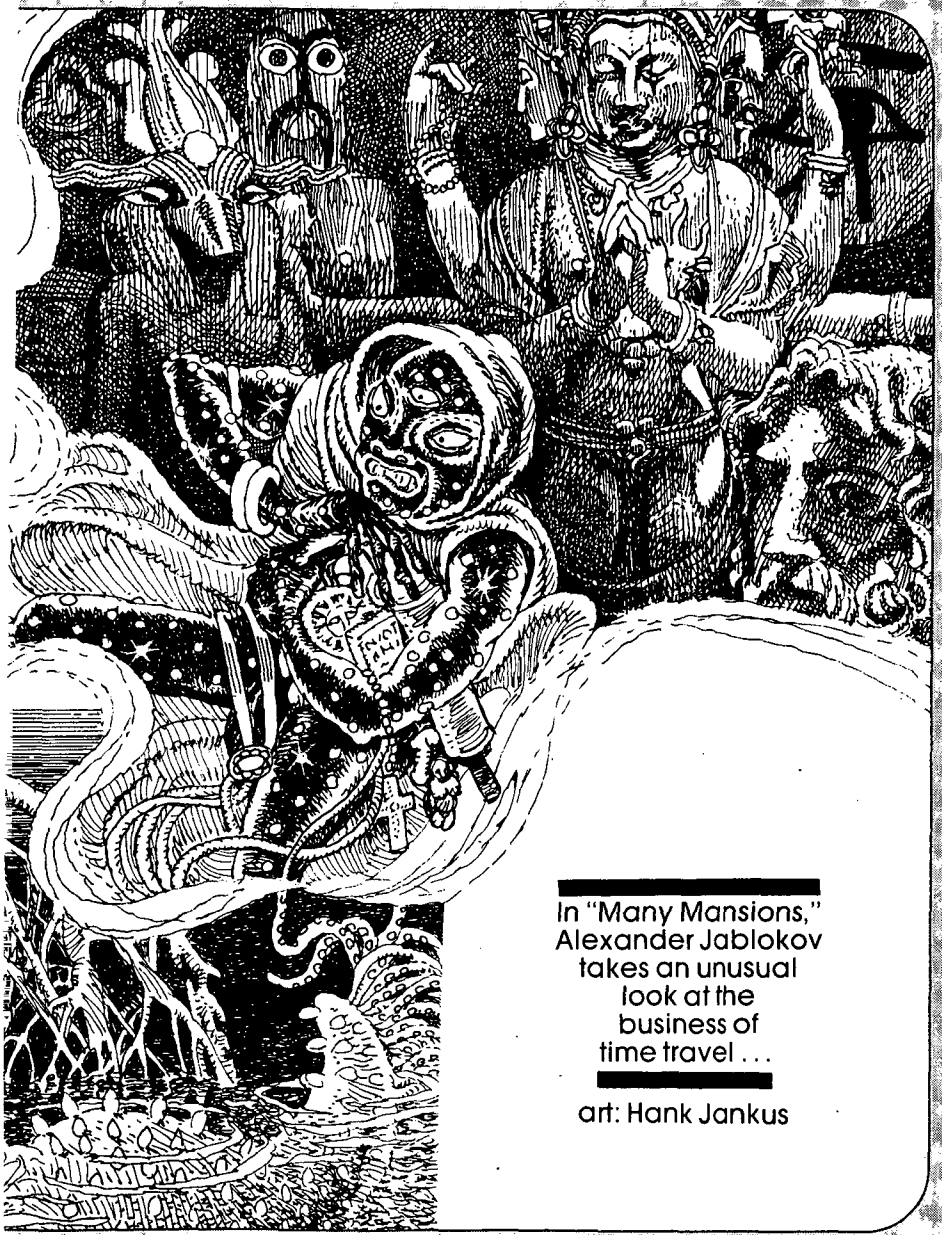

In "Many Mansions," Alexander Jablokov takes an unusual look at the business of time travel . . .

art: Hank Jankus

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The end of my vacation was announced with typical abruptness. I was in the *caldarium*, the hot pool, at the Baths of Titus, in Rome. The rotunda was lit by the afternoon sun coming through the hole in the center of the dome, and mist clung to the hot water in the pool. I relaxed, feeling nobly Roman, in one of the bathing boxes that surrounded the central water. I had a foreskin, since it would not do to be mistaken for a Jew. The fashion in male appendages varied so much according to time and place that my foreskin was attached by something approximating physiological Velcro. I had spent the day at the Forum, exchanging scandalous rumors with citizens about the Emperor Hadrian and his beloved, the boy Antinous, and what creative use they might make of the Apis bulls during their visit to Egypt, a visit that I knew, though my gossip mongers didn't, would end in Antinous's death by drowning in the Nile. I had also taken a walk over to take a look at the continuing reconstruction of the Pantheon, and finished the day in one of the reading rooms of the new Ulpian Library with a few pages from Suetonius's *Lives of Famous Whores*, one of the more charming works of group biography that I've ever read. I only wished that I was allowed to have a copy made. The water was searingly hot, and I was at peace, looking forward to a dinner party at the house of the irritating but entertaining poet Juvenal.

"Mathias!" a thin, reedy voice exclaimed. "How at ease you look, like a chicken being poached. I envy you your serene state, so soon, alas, to end." I looked around, but there was no one close enough to hear. There never was, he planned things that way, but I always check. It makes me feel like I have some charge over things.

"Marienbad," I said. "Are you all right in there?"

"Perfectly, old friend! One branch of my phylum has disported itself for years in the hot waters of Yellowstone. We are a resilient race, remember, quite unlike your sensitive species."

Marienbad rested on the bottom of the pool of the *caldarium*. He looked like a flat fish, a ray or something, I've never quite figured out what, covered with red and green Christmas tree lights, with tentacles around his edge. One of his many eyes rose up on a stalk and examined me.

"Your rest has done you well! Now, let us be on our way."

"Wait, Marienbad! Can't you give me just a minute to—"

It was worthless. Once he gets something into that aquatic mind of his, there's nothing I can do about it. The Baths, with their intricate tiling, statues, and spouting dolphins disappeared, like a slow fade in a movie. The hot water, unfortunately, disappeared along with it and I found myself with my bare ass resting in ice water. I jumped up with a shriek, and leaped up out of the water onto the twisted roots of some huge coniferous tree. I now shivered on the edge of a clear cold lake. The bright light of day, after the darkness of the Baths, was blinding. I

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squinted. In the distance, across the water, were what looked like icy peaks, gleaming in the sun. A fish broke the water and a biting wind did its best to freeze me solid.

"Marienbad!" I yelled. "Where the hell am I? Why do you do this to me?"

There was a stirring in the water beneath the roots, and Marienbad appeared on the sand, about three feet below the surface. "Is it not beautiful? This is what your geologists have called Lake Athabasca, someday to become Lake Michigan. The glaciers have retreated, but the escape of melt waters is blocked to the south by the terminal moraine. Excuse me a moment." He vanished into the deeper water.

I looked toward what I had thought were mountains: a mile high continental ice sheet. Marienbad had dropped me in the middle of the Wurm glaciation totally naked. So there was a wormhole between Rome in 130 CE and northern Illinois in 10,000 BCE. The memory modifications I had gotten from my employment by Marienbad made sure that I would remember that fact, along with everything else, including the other two thousand or so wormholes already in my memory. The space-time matrix around Earth was so lousy with them that the more I learned about them the more surprised I was that anyone managed to stay in his own time and place for more than a couple of days. I wrapped my arms around myself and curled into a ball. It didn't help. The wind sliced through me like a cleaver through calf's liver.

Marienbad reappeared, a wriggling fish in his tentacles. He proceeded to bite its head off. "Ah, delicious. Are you more alert now, old friend?"

"Alert?" I talked through chattering teeth. "In a very few moments, I will be dead."

"Mathias, you are forever difficult, and have no faith in me. Did I not hire you from your tedious archivist's post and give you the run of the centuries? Do I not defend your interests at all times, keeping various of my colleagues from eating you, or stuffing you for their collections? Do I not—"

"Get to the point, dammit !" I screamed.

"All right, all right. Behind the tree, with the rucksack. No faith. He has no faith."

I crawled around to the other side of the tree, my limbs already numb. Piled over the rucksack was a huge fur robe, large enough for the Jolly Green Giant, with the fur on the inside. I crawled in, wrapped it tightly around me, and just lay there for about ten minutes, shaking desperately, until I felt warm again. I poked my head out. One of Marienbad's eyes was looking at me. "Are you now prepared for converse?" he said, in a coldly annoyed voice.

"Yes. Now that I have at least some chance of surviving to the end of

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the conversation, we can talk." I looked at the fur I had wrapped around me and wondered what manner of beast it had come from. It was very rough. A giant ground sloth? A saber-toothed cat? Maybe a young woolly mammoth. I didn't even want to think about what manner of being that huge robe had been made for. The different millennia of Earth's history, as I had gradually found out during the course of my employment with Marienbad, played host to some four dozen species of aliens from all the planets of the Galaxy, and most of them were quite unpleasant.

"I have a job for you, Mathias Pomeranz." I hate it when he uses my full name. That means that he is acting in his official capacity as my superior officer in the Transtemporal Constabulary. "I must use your remarkable skills to track down a desperate criminal. His name is Kinbarn, and his place of origin is a planet that circles the star you know as Deneb."

"What has he done?"

"He is a dangerous addict, with a most reprehensible stimulation habit."

"And what might that be?"

"Religious revelation. Extreme caution is advised."

I slogged up the mud hill with the rest of the pilgrims. It was raining. It always rains in the Ile de France during April, even in 1227 CE. That's what makes it so green in May. But it wasn't May. It was April. My felt hat was soaked through, and my cloak was about to be. My feet sloshed in my shoes, which in turn sucked in and out of the mud with every step. I occasionally lost a shoe in the mud and had to go back for it. The wet wood of my staff was rubbing my hands raw. My vacation was over, and I was back at work.

By evening, the rain had stopped, and we had reached the town of Chartres. The towers of the cathedral caught the last rays of the sunset. It was the hour of Vespers, and from within came the sound of plainsong, and the bells rang out over the countryside. We made it in for the chanting of the Magnificat. The cathedral was dramatic in the dying light of the late afternoon, as the torches were being lit, but we were herded out rather briskly once the altar had been censed and the service was over. In the Middle Ages, pilgrims like us were treated basically as tourists with no money, the lowest of the low. We would have to wait until tomorrow to see anything.

With the disappearance of the sun it had become cold. I led the way to the pilgrim's hostel on the edge of town. There, we were all given a watery barley stew and some not overly clean straw to sleep in. I had done better, in my time, but I had also done considerably worse. The one night I had spent at Versailles, in 1672, for example, had been in a

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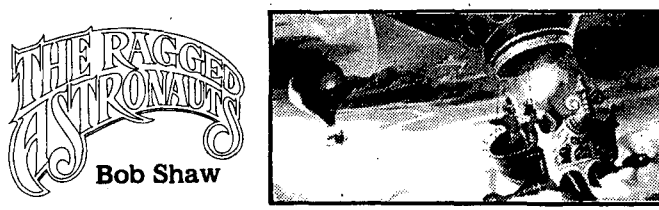

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disgusting room near the only privy in that wing of the palace, and even the privilege of seeing Louis the Sun King eat his lunch had not really made up for it. Several of my fellow pilgrims and I shared the sour wine in our leather flasks, swapped dirty stories, and went to sleep, near enough to each other for our fleas to compare notes on accommodations.

When I came awake, at about three in the morning, according to my internal clock, it was silent, except for the snores. With the torches out, the inside of the hostel was so dark that for a moment I wasn't sure if I'd actually succeeded in opening my eyes. I tripped over sleeping bodies all the way to the door.

Marienbad hadn't been able to give me much. He never does. It's always a hint, a clue, a rumor. It's no way to run a law enforcement agency, as I'd told him any number of times, but then the laws we were enforcing tended to be vague and obscure themselves. Half a million years of an entire planet's history is a hell of a jurisdiction. My lead, for what it was worth, was that Kinbarn the Denebian was known to have been in the vicinity of Chartres in the spring of 1227. Marienbad had even managed to rustle up a photograph of my quarry, along with some vital statistics. Kinbarn was about four feet high, had shiny black skin, like lacquer, and was covered head to foot with flecks of what looked like diamonds. His eyes, three of them, flickered with their own light and resembled fire opals. He smelled like the oil of bitter almonds, or perhaps like cyanide, depending on which way your fancy runs. He seemed to have no distinguishing marks or scars.

The night was cold enough for frost, and the grass crunched beneath my feet. My still damp clothes began to freeze. I was starting to give up on the idea of ever being warm again. There was a half moon in the sky, which provided enough light through the clouds for me to see my way to the cathedral. It was so silent that the sudden hoot of a owl in pursuit of a mouse somewhere out in the fields made me jump a foot in the air. The towers of the cathedral loomed above me.

The main difference between this thirteenth century Notre Dame de Chartres and the one I'd visited as a tourist in the twentieth century was the north tower. From what I could see in the moonlight, it was a permanent looking structure of wood. It would have to wait another three hundred years before it was replaced by the stone Gothic Flamboyant tower I remembered.

I made my way around to the south side of the cathedral. Much of Chartres had burned down in a disastrous fire some forty years before. Even with the enthusiastic assistance of workers from all over France, which included great lords and ladies pulling wagons of stone from the quarries, it still took a long time to build a Gothic cathedral, and the southern part was still under construction. I checked, reflexively, for

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guards, but there didn't seem to be anyone around. Chartres was miles from a city of any size, and daring midnight thefts of half ton chunks of dressed stone were apparently not considered a serious risk. Somewhere, in the village of the hundreds of workers who still labored on the cathedral, master masons slept, dreaming of making heavy rock fly. I hoped none of them were dedicated enough to sleep on the construction site.

I looked up at the south transept. Lashed-together poles made up the scaffolding, and several ladders consisting of a single pole with pegs stuck through it leaned against the wall. A couple of windlasses stood at the top of the wall, their dangling ropes making them look like gibbets in the moonlight. I grabbed a ladder and started climbing.

The south porch, with its triple doorway, was well along to being carved, and the lower stained glass windows were in place. Where the upper ones would be, eventually, on either side of the rose window, were blind, staring holes. Climbing the ladder was, because of the central pole, like riding a barrel in a fast flowing river. When I made it up to the window opening, I was shaking. I looked in. The feel of the hard marble floor far below pressed cold on my forehead, even though I couldn't see it. I poked my foot in experimentally, but couldn't find any support. I sat down, half in and half out, and thought about going back to bed. If it had been silk sheets and a fire in a palace in Provence, I might have done it. Unfortunately, the thought of rough straw reinforced my sense of duty. I didn't want to walk into that cathedral unprepared the next morning.

I climbed up farther, to the windlass, and pulled out its rope. It was heavy, and friendly as a python. It tried to pull me off my precarious ledge down to the ground, and, before I finally managed to wrestle it down to the window, it almost succeeded. I tied it down and threw the other end down into the darkness. There was no sound of its hitting the floor. I didn't stop to consider things any further, because I knew that if I did, I would just give up, straw or no straw, so I just started climbing down. When I reached the end of the rope I held on and lowered myself, feeling with my feet. I was just about to confront the possibility of having to let myself drop toward a floor an unknown distance below when my searching toes finally touched, and I let out a breath I hadn't known I'd been holding.

I began to pussyfoot around the nave. Above me were the famous stained glass windows of Chartres, newly installed and undimmed by the corruptions of time, but I couldn't see a damn thing. It was just as dark as it had been in the hostel. It is testimony to the perseverance and energy of humanity that anyone ever managed to commit crimes at night before Edison. It was too dark to do anything but sleep. A noise, somewhere, made me turn quickly. A pillar that had crept up behind me,

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waiting for that very moment, smashed me on the side of the head and knocked me to the floor with a nice, furtive crash. I lay there, cursing myself for an idiot, when I saw two torches bobbing along the west end of the nave. I took a second to pull my shoes off, then came to my feet and zeroed in on them like a moth. The stone floor was cold. Of course.

I snuck up close enough to see, then hid behind a pillar. If anyone had been looking for me, I would have been spotted immediately, but no one was looking for someone prowling around the cathedral in the small hours of the morning. The man in front wore fancy robes, and a big gold pectoral cross, and looked to be the Bishop of Chartres himself, though he wasn't wearing a mitre or carrying a crozier to make him easier for me to identify him, which was slightly inconsiderate. In paintings, bishops always wear mitres and carry croziers, so that you can tell them from the princes and the angels.

The Bishop wasn't wandering around his cathedral in the middle of the night just to make sure all the doors were locked. He walked like a man with business to attend to, night business. His face was intent. Behind him walked a bent old priest, in a simple cassock, looking, with his long white hair and beard, like a recently converted Druid. The cross around his neck was made of wood, on a leather string.

The Bishop pulled a large key from his robes and unlocked a door. The heavy metal mechanism of the lock clattered like a machine shop. The door opened on a set of stairs which, from their position, must have led to the north tower, the wooden one. I mentally flipped a coin, ignored the way it fell, and followed them through. The addition of my stealthy bare footsteps was inaudible above the clatter of the loose wooden stairs. I did get a couple of splinters in my feet.

The Bishop unlocked a second door and they entered a small room. I knelt on the stairs and peeked in, ready to run for it if anyone spotted me. Sure. I could tumble down the stairs and run frantically around the pitch black cathedral, pursued by priests who were intimately familiar with every corner of it, and finally play a game of hide-and-seek among the bones in the crypt. That was just what I needed to get my blood flowing. All I could really do was hope that they wouldn't see me in the first place.

The room was set up as a monk's cell, but like that of a monk who was a scion of a noble house. A straw pallet with a linen cover lay in a corner. A cross hung on the wall. An ornate illuminated Bible lay open on one small table, a missal, also illuminated, on another. Their rich colors and gold leaf gleamed in the torchlight. The little room, which must have been right under the octagonal roof of the spire, had windows, but instead of being covered with oilcloth, or shutters, as I would have expected, they were filled with small panels of stained glass. Even granted that this

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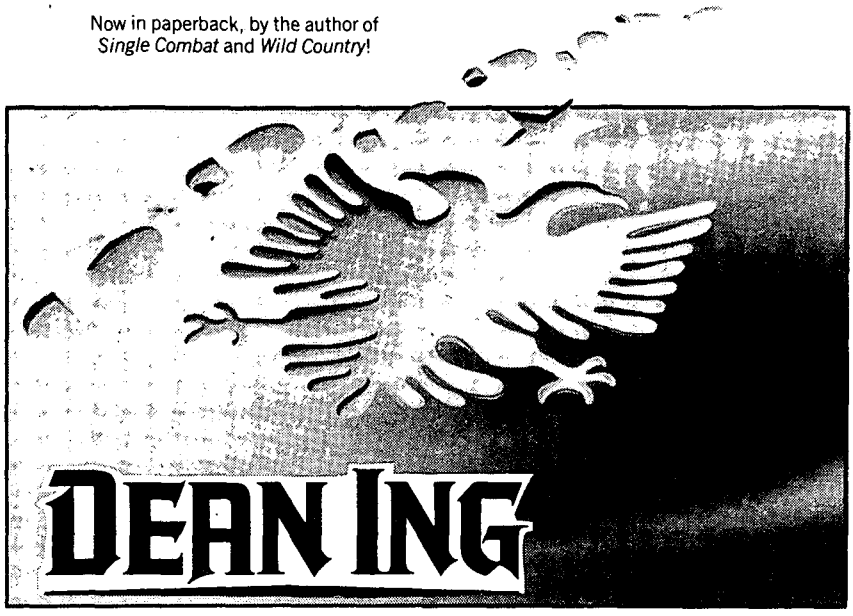

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tower was going to last until the end of the fifteenth century, which still made it "temporary" by medieval standards, it was strange that someone had bothered to put stained glass in this little private room while the rest of the cathedral was far from finished.

The Bishop took the cross off the wall and brought it into the circle of torchlight. It gleamed, and he seemed to have trouble holding it. I wasn't surprised. It looked as if it was made of solid gold, encrusted with jewels.

"He's left us, Martin," the Bishop said, sadly, looking at the cross. He set it down on the table, which rocked with the added weight. He was a straight-backed, serious-faced man with a long curling beard, filled with gray. "Just as he was ready to take holy vows, at last."

"He wasn't ready," the priest, Martin, said flatly. "He will never be ready."

"A harsh judgment."

"The duties of the priesthood are severe, my lord. And the vows are hard. Chastity," a smiled creased his face, "would have been easy enough for him. Poverty was perhaps more difficult. Obedience was much too easy for him."

"He was so fervent! More than once I had to restrain him, lest he harm himself in his devotions, with vigils, fasts, and self-mortifications. He prayed and saw visions. He may have looked like an imp of Satan—"

"Which perhaps he was. We would have had much trouble with the Inquisition on his account. But obedience, as I said, was too easy. He drank thirstily of the faith, like a drunkard pulling at a wineskin. And now that the wineskin is empty, he has thrown it aside. When morning comes, he will piss it away."

"Martin!" the Bishop, even obviously familiar with the blunt honesty of his colleague, looked shocked.

Martin was not deterred. "He was as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal, for he was without charity. I don't know by what means he came to us. . . ."

"And you won't, Martin. It is not for you to know."

". . . or where he went. These may well be secrets beyond me. But I know when he found the Word wanting. The Word is never wanting. Only we men are."

It was interesting that the priest Martin saw right through Kinbarn's deceptions, whereas the Bishop was entirely taken in. High ecclesiastics often think they're smarter than they actually are. All that incense, I think. Kinbarn was clever, as addicts often are, and could convince almost anyone to supply him with what he needed, since most like to share their faith. It was a rare man, like Martin, who could distinguish between love and need.

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"I fear for you," Martin said suddenly. The Bishop looked up from his brooding. "You have strange . . . ambitions. Perhaps, as you say, they are not for me to know, and perhaps they are, as I know you, all in the cause of the Faith. But they are dangerous."

The Bishop smiled gently, though I could see that Martin's direct statement had disturbed him. What, in fact, did our Bishop have to do with Denebian religion addicts running about through Time? He was obviously not wholly innocent. "You put up with much for my sake, Martin, and I am grateful. But the ways of God are more mysterious than we can imagine. I hope he can find his way." He sighed. "Let us say a prayer for him, Martin. And light a candle for St. Josaphat."

"St. Josaphat? A most minor saint."

"And, as such, greater than you or I, Martin. Light a candle to light his way." He paused. "I will leave on a journey tomorrow. It should not take long."

Martin shook his head. "These matters are dark."

"That may be. But we must not shrink from them on that account. It is late."

That was my cue. I retreated down the stairs before them. This was a disappointment. Kinbarn had been here, as I was told, but he was gone. I mentally reviewed the wormholes in the vicinity, to see if I could guess his destination. Wormholes are literally that, the tracks of Hoontre, hyperdimensional worms that seem to find the space-time matrix around Earth particularly delicious. It took some effort to get my mind, modified by Marienbad, to work properly. First I remembered, in excruciating detail, the geography of the island of Naxos in the III century BCE, a place I had never been. Then I found myself repeating the king lists of Lagash and Ur. My brain was like a dusty, junk-filled attic. Finally I was able to narrow the wormhole possibilities down to seven: Oklahoma, 1921; Manchuria, 406; Egypt, 1337 BCE; Ceylon, 810; Sicily, 478 BCE; a hundred miles north of the Aral Sea, 9565 BCE; and the bottom of the ocean off Hawaii, 1991. I eliminated the last possibility, which left only six.

I needed more information. The Bishop, I decided, could bear a little interrogation. In the morning. Just then I had to sleep. It took me a damn long time to find the rope.

The cathedral was awe-inspiring in the daylight. The stained glass windows glowed with their rainbow of colors, brought out best by the diffuse light of the cloudy sky, and the roof vaulted high overhead. My group of pilgrims was taken in hand by a man named Brother Benedict, who turned out to be an accomplished tour guide. He pointed out bits of grotesque carving which might otherwise have gone unnoticed, and gave

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a lively account of the various miracles the Virgin had performed here over the centuries. The climax of the tour was the actual Tunic of the Virgin Mary, the relic which was the original reason for the cathedral's existence. It lay in an ornately decorated reliquary, behind a thick sheet of glass. I moved forward with the rest of the pilgrims to kiss it. When it came to be my turn I leaned forward—and stared. After the fire that had virtually destroyed the cathedral, the Tunic had been feared lost. Someone had finally pulled it out from under a pile of rubble, miraculously undamaged, except for a slight scorching. I could see the little bits of melted thread where the cloth had been burned. I turned away, alarm bells ringing in my head. Things were becoming more serious than I had been led to expect. A relic such as an authentic Tunic worn by the Blessed Virgin Mary 1200 years ago in Palestine had to be a pious fake, but I doubted, somehow, that such a fake would, in the thirteenth century, be made out of what was obviously polyester.

Then I spotted the Bishop. He wore a traveling cloak, and boots, and would not have been recognizable as the Bishop if I had not seen him in the uniform of his office the previous night. He stood with his legs apart and his hands clasped behind his back, looking up at the construction of the north transept. He looked like a lord looking over his domain. I slipped the chain of Brother Benedict's discourse and headed toward him.

He tried to ignore me. Pilgrims were a sou a dozen, and known to be morally lax besides. And while bathing was not a popular activity of the century, pilgrims did not wear perfume. I had considered and discarded a dozen methods of approach, and finally settled on the one that had been the most successful over the years, the approach direct.

"My Lord Bishop," I said, in a conspiratorial tone. "There has been a difficulty with the Denebian."

"The what?" His brows came together and he started to look angry. "I have no idea of what you are saying." He raised his hand and made a gesture in the air. I noted it, and memorized it, but it had no conventional Christian meaning that I could remember. Time is full of such secrets.

"We have no time to waste!" I hissed. "I mean this one." I showed him the picture. It was a clever little thing, done by some agency of Marienbad's to which I have no personal access, a photograph of Kinbarn, altered to resemble a small painting in egg tempera, complete with brushstrokes and an accidental thumbprint in the left hand corner.

He made the gesture again. He seemed to be expecting a response, so I repeated his gesture back to him.

It was apparently a gesture reserved for the use of church officials of the rank of apostolic prothonotary and above, because his face turned red and his hands began to shake as he worked himself up into a towering

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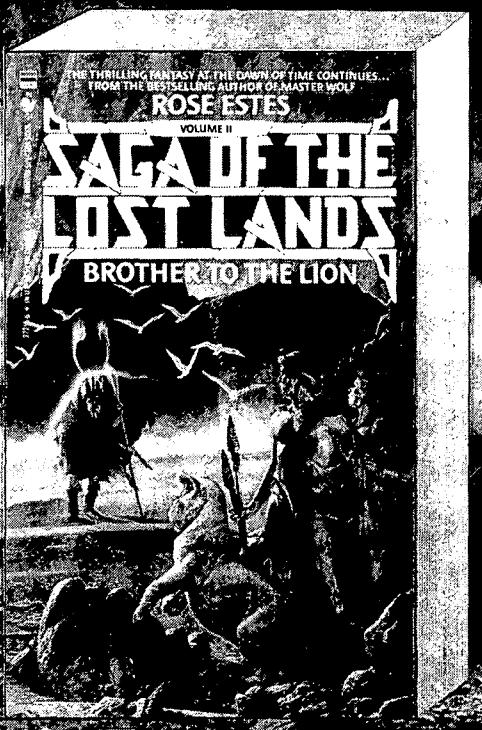

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rage. "I was warned of you, but I did not believe that such men could exist. Panderers, heretics, simoniacs, who would sell the Word of God—"

What was he talking about? "My Lord Bishop, I assure you—"

"No! The Truth is not to be sold to the highest bidder. My men will take care of you." He drew in a breath that, when expelled, would call a dozen priests and deacons down on my head, most likely to haul me off and throw me in chains.

"How dare you interfere with the business of a papal legate?" I said in a rage. The Bishop's eyes went round, and he let his breath out without a call for assistance. Before he could consider the improbability of a papal legate, usually of the rank of cardinal, and accompanied by a substantial entourage, showing up at his cathedral in the garb of a mendicant pilgrim, I forged on. "Our Pope, Gregory IX, has established a Court of the Inquisition to combat heresy. You, my dear Bishop, are obviously no common heretic, for you consort . . . with *demons*." I let my voice grow hushed with doom, and made the sign of the cross, as if unconsciously. He also crossed himself, shaking slightly, though this time with fear. I'd hit pay dirt. It was impossible to deal with a three-eyed four foot high black alien covered with diamonds and not suspect some demonic connection. The Bishop's own worries about the state of his own soul kept him from considering the flimsiness of my position. I had to move quickly, because I knew this situation could not last for very long.

"He . . . he is not a demon," the Bishop said, finally. "He is a true Christian—"

"Let me be the judge of that! Where is he? Now!" I also let my voice take on an ominous Italian accent, useful for dealing with a French Bishop.

The Bishop paused, obviously unable to decide what to tell this supposed papal legate, who would certainly know nothing about wormholes and time travel.

"The place, my lord Bishop. And the century." I laughed at his look of amazement. "Surely you do not believe yourself in possession of information unavailable to the Holy Mother Church? My, you are certainly a mass of doctrinal errors. The south of your country has been purged of the Albigensians. We destroyed Toulouse, and put the inhabitants to the sword. They were unwise. Perhaps it is now the turn of the north . . ." I was really getting to enjoy this. My Italian accent had become as thick as lasagna. The Bishop was white. "Tell me where he is! If I find him, I think I can forgive your excessive enthusiasm. If not, I will be forced to take . . . measures."

He crossed himself, slowly. "Akhetaten. The Horizon of the Sun God. In the year—"

"One thousand three hundred thirty-seven years before the birth of

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Our Lord Jesus Christ," I said, casually. "You are a wise man, my lord Bishop. I would suggest you not leave town."

I almost ran from the cathedral, but instead forced myself to move at a stately walk, which was ridiculous, because, dressed as I was in a filthy jerkin and tattered hose, I was a considerably less than dignified sight.

I had to move. I figured it wouldn't be more than a couple of minutes before the Bishop figured out that he'd been had, and sent his men after me. Egypt, 1337 BCE, one of the six wormholes from here. The trail was still warm.

First, of course, I had to stop by back at Wardrobe, since jerkin and tights was inappropriate dress for New Kingdom Egypt. Wardrobe was—well, actually I'm not sure where it was. A nexus, the site of some unimaginable Hoontre orgy, where the worm holes tangled like spaghetti. Most of the nexus was in about 15,000 CE. It was cold, nearing a glacial period, and shaggy oxen moved across the featureless land, wherever it was. Wardrobe was located in a massive outcropping of rock, about a hundred feet high. The tangle of wormholes generated some sort of temporal energy, and the nexus was static. Whenever I was there, it was the same time, late afternoon.

The rock was inhabited by Qerrarrquq, a being covered with bony plates, like a pangolin or an armadillo, about the size of a Volkswagen. He looked like the remains of some gigantic dinner party, and clattered when he moved. He was always there, a punishment of some sort, I had gathered, though I didn't know what for. A brother of his, or an accomplice, was likewise chained to Ayers Rock, another nexus, in the Australian Outback during the ninth century CE, where he was dealt with respectfully by the aborigines, who liked the fact that, when they walked around him in the right way, they dreamed of other times.

I had visions at Qerrarrquq's rock myself, of my life as the thin entering edge of a knife blade into the soft belly of eternity. My very existence felt like a wound there. It was just an image, but an incredibly strong one. I never stayed long.

"What-t-t, what-t-t," Qerrarrquq rasped. The plates on his back erected and lay down in waves, clicking like cooling metal.

I stripped and tossed him my medieval clothes. "Egypt," I said. "New Kingdom, 18th Dynasty."

"What-t-t classss?" he said.

"Middle class," I said. "Of course." He liked to play with me. His job must have been extremely dull. I wondered when his term was up.

He chortled, a sound like rusty plumbing. "No middle classsss in New Kingdom Ejjjypt. Anachronisssssm. Sssc-c-cribal perssson, you will be. Writer of hieroglyphssss. Not Mark-k-ksssissst-t-t classss at all."

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Qerrarrquq flowed across the ground into one of the entrances to the rock. I stood there naked, and shivered. It was getting to be a habit. He soon returned, and tossed me a white linen kilt and a pair of sandals.

"Is this a scribal kilt?" I said. I put it on. It didn't make me any warmer.

"Yessss. Finessst linen. Have fun."

He always said that. I was never sure if he was joking.

"When d'ye think somebody's actually going to have his carcass shoved in here?"

"Never, Akhbet. Don't be dumb. The only one crazy enough to want to spend eternity here is the Pharaoh himself."

I crouched behind a rock and listened to the chink of the tomb carvers' chisels and the drone of their talk as they did their work digging holes in the cliffside. Below me, built right up against the Nile and surrounded by an arc of cliffs, were the brown mud brick houses and white stone temples of the city of Akhetaten, newly built here at the command of the religious fanatic Pharaoh, Akhenaten. Both he and the city were named after his deity, the Sun God, Aten. That sun was now warming my back, and it was blessedly hot, after the cold of Chartres.

"Then what are we doing here, Ebber? What is all this stuff?"

"How do I know? Are these little clay circles supposed to be sun disks, or something? Pretty dull sun disks, if you ask me. And all these sewn together pieces of papyrus, covered with scribbling. Looks like a lot of work. Ah, it's all crazy, no matter what anyone tells you."

"Quiet, Ebber! Someone might hear you."

"So what? Who listens to us tomb workers, anyway? No one, that's who. Particularly when the subject of wages comes up."

"Will you shut up? That's a worse subject than Aten, or his sun disks."

"That's your problem, Akhbet, did you know that? You worry too much." Ebber raised his voice. "Hey, Nabek! Time to knock off." During their discussion, the sound of chisels had never ceased.

The overseer, a fat man in a kilt, with an elaborate copper neckpiece, leaning on his staff of office, cocked his head at the sunlight which was rapidly leaving the valley to the mercy of the shadows of the cliffs. "Don't get wise with me, Ebber," he shouted back up. He walked over near the rock behind which I was hiding. I edged back into shadow. "Damn waste of time, these holes," he muttered to himself. He raised his skirt and urinated on my rock. "All right!" he shouted in a basso profundo, official voice. "Work is done."

Workers emerged from the dozens of excavated tombs in the cliff face and streamed toward the walled compound, halfway between the city and the cliffs, where the notoriously riot-prone tomb workers were compelled to live, my two garrulous friends among them. As soon as the area

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was safely deserted, I entered the tomb they had been working on. It was just investigative thoroughness, for Kinbarn was certainly down in the city somewhere, probably getting religious instruction from the Pharaoh Akhenaten himself, and playing with solid gold sun disks.

The tomb was cut deep into the rock, an outer court narrowing to a long hall, then opening out again. Akhbet and Ebber had been carving reliefs into the walls. I stumbled into the dark tomb, stubbing my toe twice. I'm not very good with sandals. With becoming grace, I finally succeeded in tripping and falling headlong. The stone floor was exactly as hard as I had expected, but the avalanche of books and other paraphernalia that buried me was an extra bonus. I struggled out from under, grabbed an armload, and hauled it outside, where there was still enough light for me to see what I had found.

The books were bound in calfskin. Egyptians, however, had scrolls, not books. Interesting. A few minutes' concentration on the Arabic lettering inside, and I identified them as copies of the Koran. The writing was in ink of a dozen colors, ranging from deep violet to apricot. I'd also scooped up some disks of gray clay, likewise with Arabic lettering. I could see why Ebber had doubted that they were sun disks.

Things were getting more complicated. The Korans were strange enough, since the religion of Islam wasn't going to exist for another two thousand years or so, but the clay disks were more specific, since they implied the Shi'ite sect of Islam. They were made from clay from the city of Karbala—where Husain, Ali's son, was martyred—and devout Shias prayed toward Mecca with their foreheads on them. Useful to have around, if you were a Shi'ite, but somewhat wasted here, since Akhenaten was only just getting around to inventing monotheism. The tomb was packed with the things, certainly more than Kinbarn could ever use even if he pounded his forehead on the ground continuously.

Drug addicts often develop a tolerance, demanding more and more of their drug until it kills them. I tried to picture Kinbarn desperately acquiring ever more religious paraphernalia, until an avalanche of thousands of Torah scrolls or Tibetan prayer wheels fell on him and killed him. A charming thought, but most likely wrong. I filed the Korans and the disks away with the rest of the odd facts. That particular file was getting a bit overstuffed.

Now, it would seem that finding someone of Kinbarn's description shouldn't be too hard: "Lessee, he's, say, about four feet high, pitch black, kind of shiny too, covered with diamonds, and has three eyes that look like giant fire opals and glow in the dark. Oh, and he smells like bitter almonds." "Gee, mister, I don't know, we get all kinds in here. Any distinguishing marks or scars?" Easy, sure. Only anyone likely to have

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seen him was also likely, like my friend the Bishop, to be one of his, let us say, *suppliers*. Kneel down, son, first one's free. And suppliers get a mite touchy when you try to mess with their customers. The Pharaoh of Upper and Lower Egypt was not someone to be trifled with, particularly where his religion was concerned. Most people acknowledged that he had something of a bee in his bonnet on that subject. I didn't want to have my head hacked off because I had been a little too eager. There was nothing to be accomplished up at the tombs, however, so I prepared to start down toward the city.

I left my gear under a pile of rocks in a construction site on the outskirts of the city, since I couldn't fit most of it into my linen kilt. I did take a length of thin, strong line, and an interesting knife with a blade that was as flexible as cloth until you pushed and twisted it right, when it became as rigid as steel. That would have to do me, I figured, and headed into the charming burg of Akhetaten.

The place had all the character of a typical American housing subdivision, without the lawns. Built fast, in a place where no one had ever before seen fit to live, the mud brick houses had a resentful, sullen sameness, like a shaven-headed bunch of draftees in their first week at boot camp. The officials that lived in them had been hauled here by Pharaonic order from the comforts of Thebes, the old capital. There were very few people on the streets, and those were obviously heading somewhere specific rather than strolling. I didn't hear any music, or anyone laughing. Being subject to the religious obsessions of others tends to have a depressing effect.

I headed north through the city, toward the great Temple of Aten, which I could see ahead, looming over the low mud brick buildings. I dawdled a little, like a kid coming home from school with a bad report card, because I had absolutely no idea of what I would do when I got there. I finally got there. I still had no idea. I stared up at the white stone wall of the Temple complex and thought about the no doubt intricate maze of courts and halls and acolytes' quarters and culs de sac inside, where I would instantly become instantly lost. I scuffed the dirt with my sandal, and started to look over the dressed limestone blocks of the wall for a way to scale it.

"May we help you, sire?" a voice asked, just behind my right shoulder. I hadn't heard any footsteps.

I turned, with what I hoped was a fair approximation of guileless curiosity, to see who was behind me. Three men, in linen kilts and headdresses, the shorter one, in front, with a band of gold around his biceps. Shorter meant only a little over six feet, the better part of a foot taller than I was. The two in back were actually big. All three had flat, unpleasant faces, kind of lumpy, with protruding lower lips. Goons. Put

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him in a three piece Savile Row suit from Kilgore, French & Stansbury, put him in a linen kilt, it doesn't make a damn bit of difference. A goon is still a goon. The fundamental things apply, as time goes by.

"Ah . . . yes," I said. "I was looking for my dear pet viper Zeluthek-hemunum. He's bitten the serving girl and gotten out again. She was a good serving girl, too. She looks terrible now, all swollen up and blue. That little darling likes to slither around the street, nipping people's ankles. Silly thing. He bites too hard sometimes. Doesn't mean to, but his poison is quite deadly. Have you gentlemen seen him?" I peered down into the dust around their feet, which led the back two to nervously do the same.

Shorty wasn't having any. He didn't even crack a smile to acknowledge my efforts. "We got the word on you. I know who you're working for, and I don't like it."

Damn. They'd identified me as an officer of the Constabulary. That made things difficult. "I carve in the shop of Thutmose the sculptor," I improvised. "You don't like him? He can be a bit *annoying* at times, I guess, since he only likes to talk about rocks, but—"

"We have an agreement. We don't like you people messing around with our territory, understand?"

"No, actually, I don't."

You never know what's going to set somebody off. I think it was my flip tone, which my mother had always warned me about. One of the two in the back reached over with an impossibly long arm and hit me. The next instant I found myself on my back in the dust with my head buzzing. I got back up and everyone looked as if nothing had happened. They just stared at me. I put my hand to the corner of my mouth and brought it back bloody.

How had they pegged to me so fast? Who else knew I was here? Ridiculous thought, but . . . without really thinking about it, I repeated the gesture the Bishop of Chartres had made to me. One of the goons in the back made a response.

Shorty hit him. "What's happened to security around here? Now we have to change the sign."

The other rubbed his chest where Shorty had hit him, though I got the idea that it was more out of politeness than that Shorty had actually hurt him. "I thought that was our ID. It took me two months to learn that, and you never let me use it."

"Shut up!" He turned back to me. "I don't know where you learned the sign, but you penny ante types in Rylieh's gang know better than to horn in on R.E. Mann's territory," Shorty yelled. It made my head ache. "What's wrong with you guys? The bosses divided it up. Who does Rylieh think he is, anyway? This is way out of his league. He should stick to

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smuggling Books of the Dead and Horus and Seth cults out of Heliopolis and stay the hell out of Akhetaten!"

"Yeah," one of the two in the back said. "We worked this monotheism angle up ourselves. You guys ain't got the brains to handle it."

"Shut up!" Shorty said.

"We want to talk," I said.

"Talk? There's nothing to talk about."

"About Saqqara," I said, almost randomly. They didn't know I was a member of the Constabulary after all, and had mistaken me for someone else. Who? I decided to play along. I remembered the speculations about the bulls that I had participated in, back in the Roman Forum during my vacation. The city of Saqqara was the center of the cult of the bull-headed god Apis. They would still be worshipping him fourteen hundred years in the future. "We want to renegotiate the agreement. The Apis bulls—"

"Apis is ours, you son of a bitch! Osiris is ours! Isis is ours! Saqqara is our territory! Throw the bastard in the Nile! Feed him to the crocodiles!" I sensed that he was getting excited. "Grab him!"

They grabbed me. I struggled a bit, just for form's sake, and they pounded my head, for real, so I went limp. Shorty muttered all the way to the river. "A turf fight, and Rylieh started it. We'll finish it for him. Hot damn! We'll grab Anubis, God of the Underworld. They can't handle him anyway. He's popular, a great seller out around Algol, and with the races of the Seven Clusters region. We've already got the rest of the death gods. We got Hades. We got Kali. Why not? Consolidate. Death Worship Enterprises. We'll corner the market. Boy oh boy, this could be big. Those morons won't even know what hit them." I began to think he had forgotten me.

No such luck. "Drop him here. Before we throw him in, I want to see what he's carrying." He searched my kilt quickly, and found my line. "How considerate. This makes it easier. Tie him up, boys."

"The crocs like it better when they struggle," one of the other two complained.

"Never mind the crocs. They'll be happy enough." Shorty made sure the bonds were tight. "We've got to head back to base now. R.E. Mann's got to get the scoop as soon as possible."

"Hey, he told us we're not supposed to go until tomorrow morning," one of the other two said. I still couldn't tell them apart.

"There's been a change of plan," Shorty said.

"When did the plan change? Nobody told us nothing."

"I'm telling you now!" Shorty yelled, patience exhausted.

"Okay, okay already. I was just making sure. Into the drink with this guy?"

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"Right. We don't have time to watch him."

"We never get to have any fun."

"Life's just that way sometimes," Shorty said philosophically. They picked me up and the next thing I knew, the waters of the Nile were closing over my head.

Now, contrary to popular opinion, there are not all that many crocodiles in any given stretch of the Nile. Or so I kept telling myself. I swam out a little way, as well as I could with my arms and legs tied, let the current take me, and tried to find the knife. I couldn't feel it, since it was as flexible as the fabric of the kilt, which was why Shorty hadn't found it when he searched me. My lungs began to burn. By almost dislocating my shoulder, I got my hand, finally, on the hilt of the knife, and twisted. I almost lost it when the blade hardened. I pulled it up, slicing through my kilt, and cut my bonds. The line was top quality. It took forever.

When I hit the surface it took all the self-control I had not to suck in deep noisy breaths. For all I knew, my three friends were still standing on the shore, waiting for the crocodiles to provide them with a show, just to make sure. I breathed slowly and swam back upstream, in case they should be of a mind to go downstream to recover the body. The current, sluggish though it was, had already taken me north of the city. It was quite a romantic sight, really, the city at the foot of the cliffs, with the great moon hanging overhead, turning the river Nile silver. My aesthetic sense, unfortunately, was somewhat impaired at the time, and it was a long, unpleasant swim, with me expecting a crocodile to grab my leg at any moment. When the suspense finally became too much, I made for shore. I climbed up the reed-covered mud slope, straightened my sodden, sliced-up kilt, and strode manfully out onto the street, mentally daring anyone to comment on my appearance. No one did, but that was because the streets were completely deserted. It had cooled off a little with the evening, and the wet kilt started to feel a bit cold, which put me back into my usual state on this job.

My inclination to scale the wall and explore the Great Temple of Aten, never great to begin with, had by this time become a positive aversion. I wanted to go home and go to bed, but that, unfortunately, was not one of the choices. I walked slowly back to where I had left my gear. I sat down on a pile of mud bricks and wondered what I was going to do next. My answer came in the form of three rapidly walking figures, the center one gesturing and mumbling. "Rylieh thinks he has Baal and Moloch all sewn up, and is making a mint selling those big brazen idols out around Arcturus. Boy, is he in for a surprise. When we're done he won't have a claim to the seven hundred seventy-seventh avatar of Vishnu." I hid behind my pile of bricks and watched them pass. Once they had gotten far enough into the lead, I followed. I was looking for a religion

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addict, and a group of religion smugglers was as good a thing to use to find him as any. So the Bishop had put these guys on to me. That was interesting, though it didn't really help me understand anything.

They left the city, which wasn't hard, since it could be walked end to end in about ten minutes, and headed in the direction of a wadi that cut through the cliffs to the west, where the tomb of Akhenaten himself was going to be located. I kept well back, since, as seemingly the only other person in all of Akhetaten awake at this hour, I felt rather conspicuous, and had trouble keeping track of them in the darkness. They climbed a small rise, then, silhouetted against the star-filled sky and cliffs glowing in the moonlight, turned left off the path into scrub. I could hear all three of them talking now, in low voices. They slowed down, turned, and were suddenly gone.

I waited, to make sure they hadn't simply ducked down to catch me in an ambush, then made my way to the spot where I had last seen them. Nothing. Nothing at all. They had walked into a worm hole and disappeared from that tiny fragment of the spacetime continuum I was able to keep under observation. Figuring out which wormhole they had taken would have to wait until morning, when I could see something. I sat down on an outcropping and watched the moonlit flow of the Nile, just visible at the end of the wadi. The excitement of this soon palled, and it ended up being a long night.

In the morning I could follow their footprints in the sand, up to the point where they vanished. It was clear. The city of Isfahan, Persia, 1617 CE. Safavid Persia. Shi'ite Persia. I thought about the tomb full of Korans and clay disks. Stuff smuggled out of Isfahan, obviously, bound for somewhere there was a demand for it. Things were getting more interesting all the time. I checked some Persian garb out from Qerrarrquq, and followed.

I was jumped as soon as I stepped into the sunlit street that ran past the base of the great mosque of the Masjid-i-Shah, Qerrarrquq's "have fun" still ringing in my ears. It wasn't Shorty and his two friends, however, but two dark-skinned toughs with broken teeth, wearing turbans. They, however, didn't seem to have any shyness about attacking people to whom they had not been properly introduced, and moved in with their knives. I turned to run. Silly idea, really. There were three more of them behind me.

They were obviously adept at taking advantage of the moment of disorientation that comes just after coming through a wormhole. But the fact that they depended on that disorientation might make them lax. That was all I could count on. I scanned the men around me, and picked out the one who seemed less sure of himself, who hung back, to let his

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comrades take care of the messy work. I screamed and attacked him. He went down, and I kicked him in the head. Big deal. The other four moved in to filet me with their knives.

Suddenly, one of my assailants yelped and flew over my shoulder, to slam headfirst against the wall. He wore a circle of gold on his upper arm. I dodged a knife and kicked at my attacker's groin. I missed my target and fell down, narrowly avoiding another swing of his knife. Someone got his throat in a hammerlock, and he gurgled and dropped his knife. "Someone" was a tiny, dark-eyed woman with lots of rings on her fingers. She twisted, and he went limp. Meanwhile, the other two were being stood off by a hook-nosed man with a long curly beard. He kicked out, and his foot actually connected with its intended target. The footpad screamed, then he and his remaining associate turned and ran.

"Let's go," the man said, in a reasonable tone. "There may be others." The three of us trotted off down the street. I gasped for air as we ran. I had absorbed several more blows, and, on top of my previous night's adventures in Akhetaten, they made my entire body hurt. I was getting a tour of the pummeling techniques of various world capitals: I started to plan a brochure for such a tour, for when I retired from the detective business.

We found ourselves on the Maidan-i-Shah, the central square of Isfahan. It was crowded with chattering people going about the business of running their lives, and was a symbol of a world prosperous and at peace. The day was sunny and the tiled domes of the city were beautiful against the clear blue sky and the snow-covered mountains of the Zagros. I began to think that everything might make sense after all.

"We will have to make our reports to Mann," my bearded rescuer said, gloomily. My thanks for my rescue brought him no joy. He made the already familiar gesture that R.E. Mann's minions used to identify each other. I responded with the gesture I had seen Shorty's goon use. He relaxed and introduced himself. His name was Solomon ben Ezra, and the woman, his wife, was named Rachel.

Both of them stared at me, two pairs of sharp brown eyes. "Where are the other two?" she asked.

I thought fast. If my three friends from Akhetaten had left early, to return to Isfahan six hours before I had, they had been jumped by the footpads in the dark. I remembered the gold armband, which had started out on Shorty's arm and ended up on the thug's. Somehow, I didn't quite succeed in feeling sorry for him. But these two thought I was Shorty, since I had shown up at his scheduled arrival time. They'd obviously never seen him. "I, ah, I left them behind in Akhetaten. This monotheism stuff is delicate, and I think Kinbarn screwed it up." I took a leap. If the

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Bishop had sent me to Akhetaten, it wasn't because Kinbarn was still there. "It would be good if I could find him. . . ."

Solomon shrugged. "I have no idea where he is. The Horizon of Aten was difficult for him. We had to detoxify him after that one. Sun gods, indeed." He snorted, and Rachel looked contemptuous. "It took most of Isaac Newton's *Principia* to snap him out of it."

"The Talmud would have done just as well," Rachel said, with some venom. Solomon darted a frightened look at me. "Be still," he hissed. "These are private matters." She glared back at him.

"Who jumped me?" I said. "Rylieh's men?"

He looked startled. "Rylieh's? *Here*? Hardly. Rylieh doesn't have the channels for distributing Shi'ism. Last time he tried, he got stuck with a load of screaming ayatollahs somewhere off Procyon, where they don't use the hard stuff, just a little Confucianism, you know, that sort of thing. That cost him. No, your assailants were simply thugs. That happens a lot, you know. Locals find out that confused people with interesting possessions just seem to pop up in one location, from nowhere, and can be killed and robbed without consequence. Worse things, sometimes. I've heard stories . . ."

He seemed glad to change the subject, so he told me a few. They were hair raising. Rachel said nothing, but sulked. We walked the length of the Maidan, then through a gate into a side road lined with uniform buildings with arched recesses. He knocked on a door. It opened, and we entered R.E. Mann's headquarters.

The narrow hallways and dark chambers of that place were piled with junk. Religious junk. Byzantine icons, Chinese bronze temple bells, jade statues of the Aztec god Tlaloc, Tibetan Tantric scrolls, a Zoroastrian fire altar, a roll of the Torah, a particularly striking marble Athena. There was barely any room to move. And lying on top of a statue of Mithra slaying the bull was draped a soiled and tattered piece of cloth that I recognized as the original for the scorched polyester copy of the Tunic of the Holy Virgin I had seen in Chartres Cathedral.

"It would be robbery," boomed a hearty voice from another room. "Sheer robbery. They kill for this stuff around Fomalhaut. Kill for it! This is quality, Ngargh. Topnotch stuff. We're talking authentic dualism here. Real conflict. Light versus Darkness. Good versus Evil. The top match, Ngargh. The Big Event. You can't miss."

"That may well be, Mann," another voice replied. It was a disturbing voice, quavery, distant. I recognized it as belonging to a species from a planet circling the star known on Earth as Epsilon Eridani. "But 'kill for it' is an uncertain, and cheap, price. We speak of cash, valuta. For such an uncomplicated theology, you ask too much."

"Uncomplicated! You call this uncomplicated?" Mann was offended.

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"It's structured for maximal cult spin-off potential. A couple of generations, you got a dozen competing sects, you got spiritual ecstatics, you got self-mutilators, you got hysterical millenarians. Cut this stuff with some ritualistic filler, and you got some real profits. I'm talking Manicheanism here, Ngargh, not some cheap Gnostic bullshit. Real quality. It always tells in the end."

I peeked around the edge of the door. R.E. Mann looked pretty much the way I would have expected, a fat bald man with a double chin, pinky rings, a purple shirt, and a cigar. He pointed the cigar at Ngargh, who resembled a large grasshopper with its head coated with metal shavings. "Whaddya say?"

"I don't know, Mann. My principals were not pleased with the quality of the last shipment. Not pleased at all."

Mann snorted smoke. "Are you guys still whining about that Lamaism business? It's not my fault if you don't take the proper precautions, is it?"

"Yak butter!" Ngargh said. "The planets of Antares alone require fifty million metric tons of yak butter per year to burn in their ceremonies. Their economies are in a shambles."

"Whoever told you you can get religious ecstasy without side effects? Smarten up, Ngargh. Tell you what I'll do. I'll throw in a few small cults, Rastafarianism, that sort of thing, with no price increase. Sweet deal. How about it, Ngargh?"

"I wish to think about it."

"Fine, fine. Go in the other room, play with some paraphernalia. Some of it's kind of fun." Ngargh slumped out unenthusiastically. Mann's eye wandered for a moment, seeking distraction. It fixed on Solomon ben Ezra.

"Solly! Just who I wanted to see. Come in, come in. You know, Solly, I've been thinking. I've been thinking about marketing. A new concept. Now this Jewish stuff you've been giving me is great, no kidding, all these pillars of fire, manna from heaven, angels on ladders, talking serpents, floods, dens of lions, burning cities full of queers. Great stuff, and it's been a real good seller, no kidding. Hell, we got Hasidic Rigellian mud dwellers wearing spit curls and fur hats. But, as I said, I've been thinking. We could really make it, I mean graduate Judaism to real blockbuster status, if we had a good central symbol. A hook, Solly. We need a hook." With a hand on his shoulder, he led Solomon over to a bulky shape covered with a drop cloth. "You know, we helped old Pharaoh Akhenaten out with that sun worship business of his. He didn't get the hang of monotheism for quite a while, kept asking if his god wouldn't get lonely, with no pantheon to play with. But I convinced him. I could do the same for you. If I could take a meeting with one of your top boys,

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Well, as we said, everyone was right. This breathtaking novel of a young woman whose dreams take her on an emotional odyssey through the heartland of the Civil War was raved about from coast to coast when we published it in hardcover. The *San Francisco Chronicle* used words like "tantalizing" and "fascinating" and "impeccable." The *Washington Post Book World* called it "a novel of classical proportions and virtues." *The New York Times Book Review* said it was "a love story on more than one level, and Ms. Willis does justice to them all. It was only toward the end of the book that I realized how much tension had been generated, how engrossed I was in the characters, how much I cared about their fates." And the *Denver Post* commented that "the revelation at the end is the most poignant moment in a book crammed with poignancy."

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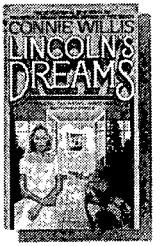

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you know, Moses, Abraham, Jeremiah, whoever, we could come up with something that would sweep the market. We'd be rich in no time. I'm talking awesome." With a grand gesture, he whipped the cloth off, revealing a gleaming statue. It was a golden calf. "Hot stuff, eh, Solly? Can't miss."

Solomon's face went white. "I'll . . . I'll have to think about it."

"You do that, Solly. No rush." Mann sat back down in his chair, clasped his hands over his belly, and stared at me. "And who's this guy?"

Solomon turned a startled and speculative look at me. "Why—he is one of our agents, from Akhetaten."

Mann shook his head decisively. "No way, Solly. I ain't never seen him before."

"He is an agent of our enemies, those minions of Rylieh who seek to profit from the teachings of Our Lord. He came to me, asking of Kinbarn." The Bishop of Chartres entered the room. He wore local garb, loose flowing trousers and vest, but still had his cross dangling in the middle of his chest. It sounded as if R.E. Mann had really sold him a bill of goods, coming off as Mr. Clean.

"Rylieh!" Mann's face tried to turn as purple as his shirt, and almost made it. "That scumbag's been giving me a real pain. Particularly Egypt. We divided up the territory, but he's trying to horn in." He peered at me. "Or are you some small operator? Did Belle Zebub send you? She's got the monopoly on the Pharisees. Small sect, but really popular, for some reason. Ah, screw it. Alphonse, get 'im!" There was suddenly a huge figure behind me. How did people keep sneaking up on me? He took hold of me, gently. I felt like I had been welded into an Iron Maiden. He looked about twice the size of the two goons from Akhetaten. He had a tiny head which looked like its only purpose was anchoring neck muscles. With a turban on it looked like a bandaged thumb. He caught me looking at him and hit me. I got the idea, and stopped looking at him.

"What luck!" Mann said. "Ngargh was thinking of buying Thuggee, the ritual murder cult of the goddess Kali, but I told him we were fresh out of demonstration models. I think we can put it back in the catalog." He began to stalk around the room, throwing open cabinets and burrowing through them. "Silken strangling cords, silken strangling cords," he muttered. "How come nothing ever stays put around here?" He looked up at all of us. "Don't just stand there. Stick him in a cell. Hell, let him pick out some last rites for himself, on the house." He winked at me. "No one ever called R.E. Mann a cheapie. Enjoy yourself."

Alphonse hauled me downstairs and threw me into a room the size of a gym locker that smelled of urine and pain. The door slammed shut and left me in total darkness. I leaned against the rough stone walls and

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decided that, at long last, I could not console myself with the thought that things could be worse.

The Bishop looked worried. Extremely worried. "You are a Catholic?" He spoke to me through a slot in the door.

"Yes, of course," I lied. "You cannot allow me to die unshriven." I tried to fall to my knees, as well as I could within the confines of that tiny cell.

"Wait, wait," he said. I could tell I'd called him right, from what I had seen and heard that night, when he'd gone to Kinbarn's monk's cell with Martin. He was a genuine and convinced Christian. "If you are a Catholic, why do you not help us in our struggle to convert the ignorant races of the Galaxy?"

Oho. So that was it. The urge to proselytize is a dangerous one. The Bishop was bagging souls and racking up an immense score, not realizing the hollowness of his triumph. Martin had realized the truth.

"I pursued Kinbarn," I said, "because of the sacrilege he had committed, to assist in Mann's marketing plans."

A sharp indrawn breath. "What sacrilege?"

"He stole the true Tunic of the Virgin, put a false one in its place. The true Tunic will go to one of Mann's local dealers, somewhere else in the Galaxy."

"You lie! It is the same relic that has been there since I can remember. I was almost convinced by your—"

"The Tunic was switched long before your time, at least before the fire, forty years ago, your time. There are other wormholes to Chartres, you realize. If you wish to find the real Tunic, it lies among Mann's loot, upstairs. It lies on top of—" I was talking to empty air. The Bishop was gone. But the door was still locked.

A few minutes later I heard voices. It was Rachel and Solomon, who had decided on the hallway leading to my cell as a convenient place to argue.

"I warned you," she said. "I told you it was dangerous, that it was a sacrilege. 'The search for knowledge is God's work,' you said. 'Selling your soul is the Devil's work,' *I* said. Now look where you've gotten us."

"I know," Solomon said miserably. "We will leave now, and return to our shtetl, in Chelm. It was so green there." He sighed. "I never thought that I would miss Poland."

"Leave? And allow that abomination to continue its foul existence? The golden calf, Aaron's sin, right before your eyes. How can you ignore it?"

Solomon groaned. "Oh God, I should have stuck with my study of the Talmud. It is so much less complicated."

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"That's what *I* told you."

"I know, I know."

"Hey!" I said. "I can help you."

They stopped their argument and came up to the door to my cell. "How can you help us?" Solomon said, hope coming into his voice.

"He can't," Rachel said, venomously. I felt like hitting her. "He's just one of Mann's competitors. He'd sell that golden calf just like Mann. He's no different."

"You're wrong. I'm not like the others," I said. "I'm an agent of the Constabulary. I'm after Kinbarn."

The slot opened up and Solomon peered in, eyes wide. "The Constabulary? Why are you after Kinbarn? He's just a runner, small fry."

"I've figured that out, finally. Don't you know how hard it is to police an entire planet over five hundred millennia? Let me tell you, it's a real bitch." I realized I was sounding querulous, but figured I'd earned it. "It's a wonder we get anything done at all. Particularly stuck in a cell in the basement of a building in seventeenth century Isfahan. Now if you just let me out—"

Rachel muttered something that indicated that she was still suspicious about my bona fides, but Solomon simply said, "How?"

"Do I have to think of everything?" I said aggrievedly.

"It would certainly help."

Before I could think of a wise reply, we all heard the stair creak beneath an abnormally heavy step. Solomon and Rachel vanished. The door creaked open and Alphonse hauled me out of the cell. He carried me up to the top floor, kneeled me down, tied my hands and feet, and left me alone with Mann and Ngargh.

Mann held a scarlet silk cord in his hands. He stroked it. "See how it clings, Ngargh?" he said. "Only the best ones do that." He put it around my neck. Ngargh watched with interest. "Doing this is a little tricky. It's harder than it looks. When you're done with the messy part, there's a few chants, the consecration of the pickax, and the sacrifice of sugar. Nothing to it, really, but it makes for a nice change of pace."

"Do proceed," Ngargh said.

The cord tightened. Suddenly, the door crashed open. Mann jumped back and dropped the cord. Standing in the doorway was an awe-inspiring figure. It was the Bishop of Chartres, in the full glory of ecclesiastical vestments, chasuble and stole in gold and scarlet, a mitre on his head, and a gold crozier in his hand. For the first time since I'd seen him, he was unmistakably a Bishop. He made the sign of the cross at us.

"My house shall be called a house of prayer, but you have made it a den of thieves," he thundered.

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"Save it for the marks, Bishop," Mann said, as he picked the cord back up. "Close the door, you're letting in a draft."

"You have committed a gross sacrilege, and are beyond forgiveness, R.E. Mann."

Mann looked irritated. "Hey, look, Bishop, don't you know your own product? Forgiveness is one of the biggest selling points of—"

The heavy, gold encrusted crozier made a misleadingly soft thunk as it struck Mann's head and knocked him across the room into a corner, where he lay sprawled and unconscious. Ngargh backed into the opposite corner, trembling. "I believe I expressed an interest in some rather less violent devotions. Zen Buddhism, for example. This is not to my liking. No, no indeed."

The Bishop stared at what he had done, now at a loss. There was a huge crash and someone else now came through the door, though he didn't bother to open it first. It was Alphonse, who came through as if fired from a cannon. A very large cannon. He fell on his back, but was on his feet in an instant, completely unaffected by his unusual mode of entry. Rachel and Solomon ran in after him. They darted around Alphonse, like rabbits around a bear. Rachel grabbed his knee, barely having to bend down to do so, and Solomon bounced high into the air and kicked him at the angle of his jaw. His head snapped back. Rachel's fingers went under his kneecap and he screamed and toppled. They both played soccer with his head for a while, and he was finally silent. I was not able to do anything but kneel and watch, which was fine, because there was no way I could have helped.

Solomon came up behind me and cut my bonds with a knife. "Where did you learn to do that?" I asked.

"Where I grew up, Polish soldiers are a constant problem. We are not allowed to carry arms, but we have learned to deal with it." As an afterthought, he walked over and punched Ngargh, who fell over, kicked once, and was still. "Now we must try to escape with our lives."

The Bishop shrugged out of his robes. "These are most strange," he said. "So soft, like a lady's undergarments. Satin and silk. See?"

I felt the material. It did indeed feel like lingerie, though how the Bishop knew what lingerie felt like I did not ask. I examined the insignia on the buttons. After a moment, it came to me. "Ah," I said. "sixteenth century Italian. Borgias, Medicis. They did believe in comfort in everything, even their vestments, when their families succeeded in making them a Bishop." I smiled to myself. Did wearing these make the Bishop of Chartres a transvestmentite? I suppose that that then made Kinbarn a transectual. I wished there were someone around to appreciate the joke though, on second thought, I suspected that such a person might be hard to find.

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Solomon and Rachel took some time to destroy the golden calf. It turned out to be gold sheet over a figure of wood, which broke satisfyingly into splinters.

When they had finished, Solomon led us all through several back passages and out into the street. At his insistence, we carried Mann along with us. He would not listen to any arguments to the contrary, and he and the Bishop seemed to have reached some sort of agreement, so I was outvoted. Mann was heavy, and we kept trading him back and forth. We crossed over the tree-lined Chahar Bagh, the avenue that led south, and into a tangle of houses and shops. Several passers-by stopped to stare at us and our burden.

"Poor fat Mustafa," Solomon said sadly, loudly enough for everyone to hear. "The heat. Too much wine."

"A load," I said, enjoying the act. "He is a great, sodden load."

"His wives will slaughter us," Solomon said. "But as his friends, we have no choice."

"Woe is us," I agreed. "His wives are cruel."

"And he is heavy."

Our litany turned the unconscious body of Mann from a victim into a figure of fun. Shopkeepers laughed and waved to us, and small boys ran alongside, making fun of fat Mustafa. Solomon cuffed them and chased them away. "Insolent children! Do not make fun of your elders."

We entered a cul de sac. Solomon felt forward carefully, his face grave. He then signaled to us, and we brought the body forward. Gently, maintaining a precise angle, he rolled it toward the wall. It was a difficult matter to send someone through a wormhole without actually carrying him through yourself. Mann, just waking up and muttering, vanished down the wormhole. I looked up at Solomon. Sweat had beaded his brow, and he was shaking. Rachel, silent for once, rubbed his back. The Bishop avoided my glance.

"It is a terrible thing," Solomon said. "But necessary."

I was starting to suspect something. "Where did you send him?"

"A place," he said. "A certain place."

"*Where?*"

He stared off into space. "I told you that there are certain wormhole exits known to local inhabitants, who use them for their own purposes, like those men who attacked you. The other end of this wormhole is in Mexico, in the mountains north of Guadalajara, in the year 5304 by our calendar, 1543 by yours. The Spaniards have everywhere prohibited the old religion, which entails human sacrifice to the god Huitzilopochtli. The sacrifice is followed by a cannibal ritual, an important part of the diet of the priesthood. Victims have grown scarce. Yet, a small temple

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survives, even flourishes, in a hidden valley, a place where mysterious people suddenly appear from nowhere."

I thought about Mann's fate and shuddered. He'd somehow never realized his game of religion had turned serious.

The Bishop choked. "May God have mercy on our souls."

"I would not be surprised if He doesn't," Rachel said. She tugged at Solomon's sleeve. "Let us go. Chelm is far from here." Solomon nodded silently and, not looking at us, allowed her to lead him away. They walked out the end of the street, turned the corner, and were gone. The Bishop and I just looked at each other.

"Did you manage to get it?"

He reached into his shirt, and let me catch just a glimpse of the Tunic of the Virgin. "Martin will aid me in replacing the fraud that lies within the reliquary at the Cathedral. He is an accepting soul, and miracles are of little consequence to him, as they are to any man of true faith. But I have been long enough away, and it is time that I returned."

"Wait," I said. "I still have a job to finish. Where is Kinbarn?"

He smiled. "Venerating St. Josaphat, as I think you overheard me tell Martin."

Great. Now he was being coy. "Please don't play games with me, Bishop."

He chuckled. "Ah, how soon humor leaves when the joke concerns ourselves. St. Josaphat is not a true saint. He is based on a rumor of a most holy man, who lived in India. His faith, however, was not Christian, which should have prevented his canonization. In the early days of the Church, such things were not always administered with proper rigor. You know him better, perhaps, as Gautama Buddha."

"Thank you very much, your Reverence." I knelt, and he blessed me. We went through three wormholes, and arrived in Chartres in 1227. He proceeded to the Cathedral, and I went through the wormhole that led from that time and place to the central highlands of Ceylon, in 810. St. Josaphat. I should have remembered that. It could have saved me a hell of a lot of trouble.

I emerged in a garden. I couldn't see it, because it was night there, but I could smell the ponderous aromas of night-blooming flowers, and hear the chuckle of a running spring. Birds whooped at each other. The air was warm, and damp, and I stood there, waiting, while my eyes adjusted to the darkness and the moon rose over the mountains to light my way. I stood on a wide, grass-covered path that ran through the garden. The spring ran into a small ceremonial pool, intended for ritual ablution. My need for washing was considerably more than symbolic,

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and I took advantage of it. I hadn't had a bath since Rome, however long ago that had been.

The trail ran up the hill toward the looming, bulbous shapes of dagobas, which housed Buddhist relics. Below me, in the darkness, I could now hear the lazy rumble of a river. As the hill became steeper, the trail became stairs, which climbed among the low wooden buildings of the Buddhist monastery surrounding the dagobas. All was darkness and silence.

"May I be of assistance?" a voice said. Behind me. Again.

This time I didn't even bother to turn around. I just stopped and let him walk around in front of me. He was a tiny, bald, ancient monk in a saffron robe. He smiled at me, shyly and toothlessly, and bowed, or rather bobbed up and down repeatedly, like some sort of foraging bird.

"I'm looking for—" Oh hell. Why not? "I'm looking for a four-foot-high black demon covered with diamonds. Seen any lately?"

He tried to look sad, but his eyes glowed joyfully. The result looked like mockery. "You are too late."

Damn, damn, damn. Always too late. "Where has he gone?"

"Nirvana!" he said, and stood up straight. He was not much taller than Kinbarn. "His soul has left the Wheel. Follow me, you will see."

I walked behind him, slowing my pace to his tiny, shuffling steps. We walked past several of the dagobas and into a hut perched precariously on a cliffside. Inside, it was pitch black. I heard a faint humming sound. My guide struck a flint and lit several lamps inside the hut. It grew bright enough to see.

Kinbarn sat in the middle of the room, in full lotus position. His three eyes stared off into nothingness. The faint hum came from somewhere inside of him, soft, but unceasing. I walked up and touched him. He did not react. An empty bowl sat next to his left knee.

"We feed the body," the monk said. "Rice."

I thought about shouting "Come with me pal, you're under arrest!" It didn't seem quite appropriate. I stood and watched him for a long time, letting that hum penetrate, until I couldn't stand it any longer. It felt like something I'd been hearing all my life, but never noticed. The basic sound of the universe, maybe. The echoes inside my own skull. I didn't know. All I knew was that hearing it, out loud like that, was going to drive me crazy. I thanked the monk for his trouble, and left. He smiled after me. He did have one tooth, I saw in the lamplight, at the right, way in back.

So much for Kinbarn. The basic problem with using an addict as your runner and contact man, no matter how good he might be, is that, sooner or later, being so near the stuff all the time, he'll overdose.

I pushed my way into the jungle around the monastery toward a worm-

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hole, trying not to think about panthers and snakes. It was time to return to the rendezvous point.

Marienbad was waiting. He lay on the bottom of a large swimming pool behind an elaborate Moorish mansion in Beverly Hills, 1923. It was midmorning. The house seemed to be deserted, though I could hear the hiss of sprinklers and the low conversation of Mexican gardeners, somewhere behind the hedges. I sat down in one of the chairs by the side of the pool. "I want a daiquiri," I said.

Marienbad chuckled. "It is the houseboy's day off, I fear. He is assisting at a party at Cecil B. DeMille's house. They are celebrating the release of his film *The Ten Commandments*. It is good to see you again, Mathias. Where is our miscreant?"

I gave him the story, both barrels. The Bishop, Solomon, R.E. Mann, Korans in New Kingdom Egypt, golden calves, Nirvana.

"Astounding!" he said. "I must say, I had half suspected such an operation."

"Why didn't you warn me about it then? You could have saved me a lot of grief."

"Mathias! And prejudice you? That would not have been professional. But you have done an excellent job, nonetheless. Leaving the well-larded Mr. Mann to be repasted by hungry Aztec religionists was a stroke of genius. I applaud you. But, as you may have concluded, our job is not yet finished. We have uncovered an smuggling operation, incredible for its great size, and its lack of scruples. Religious faith! Parents spend their family's monies on sacrifices and ritual vessels, children become intoxicated with dogma and doctrine. The social fabric of life is rent apart. A young lad begins with a few of Loyola's *Spiritual Exercises* in the bathroom between classes, and before he knows it he has a cross on his back and is converting the heathen to support his own vile habit. We must put a stop to this!" His voice quivered with outrage.

I had been afraid of that. "When do I get a vacation?"

"After all this fun, you wish a vacation? Oh, very well, Mathias. I know you are difficult. One week. Go to Elizabethan London. Take in a few plays, drink some sack, roister. That was a good time for roistering. But remember, when you return, you have your work cut out for you. The villain Mann has been masticated and digested. Rylieh, and justice, have yet to be served!" ●

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SIR JOHN MANDEVILLE'S REPORT ON THE GRIFFIN— PERSIA, TWELFTH CENTURY

by Jane Yolen

Hiking in the Scythian hills,
John Mandeville stops for his tea,
Unpacks his hamper, eats his scones,
Surveys the land for a rarity,
Some miracle, some un-nature
To make this trip to Araby
  The cause for royalty's delight,
  So that he might become a knight.

The air is heavy, hot, and still,
Yet Mandeville hears overhead
The shuttering of metallic wings.
(In ether are the best dreams bred.)
The hamper holds more than his tea.
He scatters on the ground the bread
  That he has brought, the bloody meat
  Which predators will find a treat.

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Then he sits down, his pen in hand
To wait upon the mythic beast
And capture it upon the page
While it chokes down his proferred feast.
The ink dries up long, long before
Our John's imaginings have ceased.
The foolscap tells an eerie tale
Of griffin wing and tooth and nail.

"They have the shape," he scribbles down,
"Eagle before, lion behind."
His eager pen invents the form,
Remarks the species, clan, and kind;
Recounts the fierceness of the race
That guards the gold the gods have mined.
His travelogue has just the wit
To make the facts all sort-of fit.

And when the clattering wings depart,
And once again the land is clean,
He finishes his travel notes
And making certain that they mean
A metaphor to please the king,
A parable to tempt the queen,
Ignoring what his eyes behold,
A different tale is what he's told.

The transformation on the page,
The careful building blocks of diction
Cause our traveler little pain
Nor cause his heart the slightest friction.
He knows full well the audience
For his attempts at science fiction.
His work at home will not be slighted.
And for his travel book he's knighted.

MORAL:
The moral of this tale is given:
Where you see eagle, there write griffin.

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"The Hob" is Judith Moffett's second short story and her first to be published in *IAsfm*. Her first story, "Surviving," was a finalist for the 1987 Nebula award and the winner of the first Theodore Sturgeon Award. Her highly regarded first novel, *Pennterra*, was published in our *Isaac Asimov Presents* book line last fall.

THE HOB

by Judith Moffett

art Laura Lakey

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I

Elphi was the first of them to wake that spring, which meant he was the first to catch, almost at once, the faint whiff of corruption. Feeling ghastly, as always upon just emerging from hibernation, he dragged himself out of his bunk to go and see which of the remnant of elderly hobs had died during the winter.

He tottered round the den in darkness, unable as yet to manage the coordination required to strike a light. Nor did he really require one. Hobs were nocturnal. Besides, this group had been overwintering in the same den for nearly a hundred years.

Tarn Hole and Hasty Bank lay together, deep in sleep. Hodge Hob seemed all right . . . and Broxa . . . and Scugdale. . . . Ah. Woof Howe Hob was the dead one. Elphi checked on Hart Hall, just to make sure there had been only one death, then wobbled back to his own bed to think.

They would have to get Woof Howe out of the den: he thrust that thought, and the necessity for fast action, into the forefront of his mind to blank out the yawning hollowness, the would-be grief. Every decade or two, now, another of them was lost. The long exile seemed to be coming inexorably to an end, not by rescue as they had gone on expecting for so long, but by slow attrition. Only seven were left of the fifteen stranded in this place, and soon there would be none.

Elphi rolled out again; these thoughts were unproductive, as they had ever been. He needed a drink and a meal.

The great stone that had sealed the den all winter posed a problem. By human standards the hobs were prodigiously strong for their size, even in great age, but Elphi—feeble after his months-long fast—would ordinarily not have attempted to move the stone unaided. But he managed it, finally, and poked his head with due caution out into the world.

Outside it was early April on the heather moors of North Yorkshire. Weak as he was, Elphi shuddered with pleasure as the fresh moorland wind blew into his face. The wind was strong, and fiercely cold, but cold had never bothered the hobs and it was not for warmth's sake that Elphi doubled back down the ladder to fetch forth something to wrap around himself, something that would deceive the eyes of any unlikely walker still on the tops in the last few hours of light. That done, he dragged the heavy stone back across the hole, sealing in the scent of death, and set off on all fours stiffly through the snow-crusted heather.

He followed a sheep-track, keeping a weather eye out as he trotted along for any farmer who might be gathering his moor ewes to bring them down "inside" for lambing now. Those years when the hobs slept a bit later than usual they sometimes found their earliest forays cramped

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by the presence of farmers and dogs, neither of which could be easily fooled by their disguise. When that happened they were forced to be nocturnal indeed.

But the sheep Elphi saw had a week to go at least before they would be gathered in, and he began to relax. Walkers were always fairly few at this uncomfortable season, and the archeologists who had been working at the prehistoric settlement sites on Danby Rigg the previous summer were not in evidence there now. Perhaps getting rid of old Woof Howe would not be quite so difficult as he had feared—not like the year they had woken in mid-April to find Kempswithen dead and the tops acrawl with men and dogs for days. The only humans he was at all likely to encounter this late afternoon would be hauling hay up to their flocks, and since their tractors and pickups made a din that carried for miles in the open landscape he had no fear of being caught napping.

The local dogs all knew about the hobs, of course, as they knew about the grouse and hares, but they rarely came on the tops unless they were herding sheep, and when they were herding sheep they generally stuck to business. The problem dogs were those the walkers allowed to run loose, whether under good voice control or no. *They* could be really troublesome. In August and September, when the heather turned the moorland into a shag carpet of purple flowers forty miles wide and a tidal wave of tourists came pouring up to see and photograph them, the hobs never showed their noses aboveground by day at all. But it was a bother, despite their perfect ease at getting about in the dark; for except from November to April hobs didn't do a lot of sleeping, and they always had more than enough essential work to see to. Then there was the grouse shooting, which started every year on August twelfth and went on till long after Elphi and his companions had gone to ground for the winter. . . .

Of course, the horde of August visitors was also a great boon. All summer the hobs picked up a stream, steady but relatively thin, of useful stuff dropped or forgotten by visitors. August brought the flood, and the year's bonanza: bandanas, wool socks, chocolate bars, granola bars, small convenient pads of paper, pencils and pens, maps, rubber bands, safety pins, lengths of nylon cord, fourteen Swiss Army knives in fifteen years, guidebooks, comic books, new batteries for the transistors (three) and the electric torches (five). Every night in summer they would all be out scavenging the courses of the long-distance footpaths, the Lyke Wake Walk and the Cleveland Way, each with a big pouch to carry home the loot in.

Earlier and later in the year, however, they were forced to spend more time hunting, and hunting a meal was Elphi's first priority now. Luckily he and his people could digest just about anything they could catch (or

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they would not have been able to survive here at all). They were partial to dale-dwelling rabbit and spring lamb, and had no objection to road-killed ewe when they could get it; but as none of these was available at the moment, Elphi settled for a grouse he happened to start: snapped its neck, dismembered it, and ate it raw on the spot, hungrily but neatly, arranging the feathers to look like a fox kill (and counting on a real fox to come and polish off the bones he left behind).

Satisfied, his head clearer, Elphi trotted another mile to a stream, where he washed the blood off his hands and had his first drink in more than four months. He had begun to move better now. His hands and broad feet shod in sheepskin with the fleece side out settled into their long habit of brushing through the old snow without leaving identifiable tracks. Still on all fours, he picked up speed.

Now then: what were they to do with Woof Howe Hob so that no human could possibly discover that he had ever existed?

Burning would be best. But fire on the moors in April was a serious thing; a fire would be noticed and investigated. The smoke could be seen a long way, and the Park rangers were vigilant. Unless a convenient mist were to cover the signs . . . but the hobs almost never, on principle, risked a fire, and in any case there were far too few stored peats in the den to burn a body, even a hob's small body. Elphi suddenly *saw* Woof Howe on a heap of smouldering peats and his insides shriveled. He forced the picture away.

They would have to find someplace to bury Woof Howe where nobody would dig him up. But where? He cursed himself and all the rest, his dead friend included, for having failed to work out in advance a strategy for dealing with a problem so certain to occur. Their shrinking from it had condemned one of their number—himself, as it turned out—to solving it alone if none of the others woke up before something had to be done.

Elphi thought resentfully of the past century and a half—of the increasing complications the decades had added to his life. In the old days nobody would have fussed over a few odd-looking bones, unless they'd been human bones. In the old days people hadn't insisted on figuring everything out. People had accepted that the world was full of wonders and mysteries; but nowadays the living hobs' continued safety depended on making the remains of their dead comrades disappear absolutely. They'd managed it with Kempswithen, rather gruesomely, by cutting him into very small bits quite unrecognizable as humanoid, and distributing these by night over four hundred square miles of open moorland. None of them would care to go through that again, unless there were positively no other way.

Elphi thought about that while he gazed out above the stream bed and

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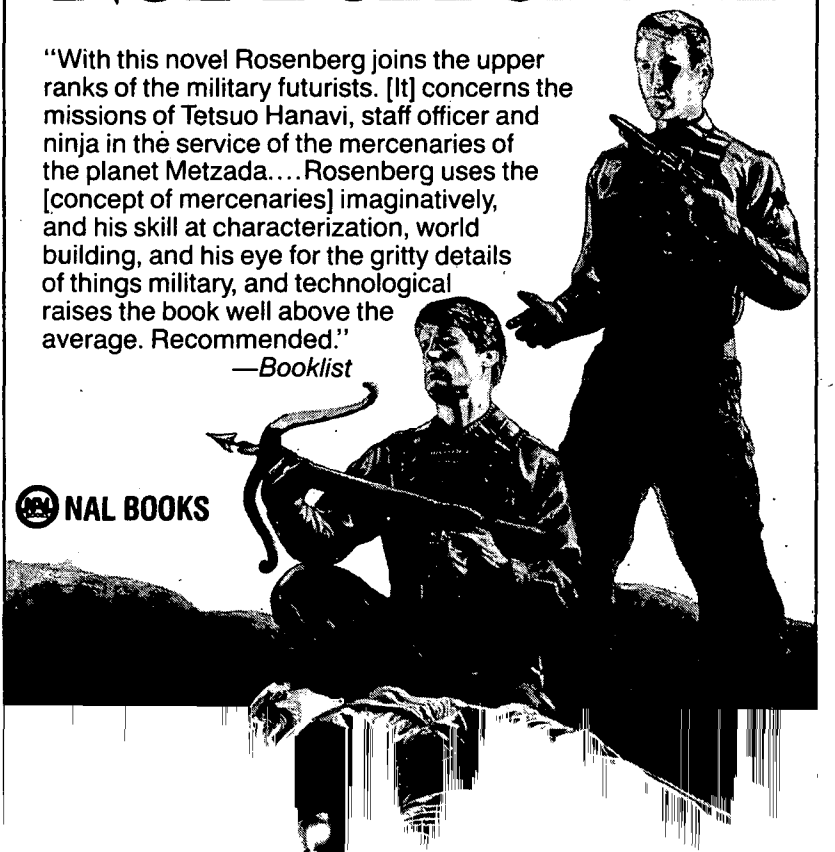

NAL BOOKS

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the afternoon wore gradually on. The air was utterly clear. Far off to northwestward the peak of Roseberry Topping curled down like the tip of a soft ice-cream cone (Elphi knew this, having seen a drawing of one in a newspaper a hiker had thrown away); and all between Roseberry Topping and Westerdale Moor, where he now risked standing upright for a moment to look, swept the bristly, shaggy, snowy heath, mile after mile of it, swelling and falling, a frozen sea of bleakness that was somehow at the same time achingly beautiful. White snow had powdered over an underlayer of russet—that was dead bracken at the moor's edge—and the powdered bracken lent a pinkish tint to the whole wide scene. The snow ended roughly where the patchwork fields and pastures of Danby Dale and Westerdale began, and among these, scattered down the dales, were tiny clumps of stone farm buildings.

Elphi had spent the first, best two centuries of his exile down there, on a couple of farms in Danby Dale and Great Fryup Dale. These dales, and the sweep of bleakness above them, made up the landscape of most of his extremely long life; he could scarcely remember, anymore, when he had had anything else to look at. However truly he yearned for rescue with one facet of his soul, he beheld these dales with a more immediate yearning, and the moors themselves he loved with a surprising passion. All the hobs did or had, except Hob o' t' Hurst and Tarn Hole Hob. Woof Howe had loved them too, as much as any.

Elphi drew in the pure icy air, and turned once around completely to view the whole great circle of which he was the center, noting without concern as he turned that a wall of mist had begun to drift toward him off the sea. Then he dropped down, and was again a quadruped with a big problem.

They might *expose* Woof Howe, he thought suddenly—scatter the pieces in that way. It would be risky, but possible if the right place could be found, and if the body could be hidden during the day. Elphi set off northwestward, moving very rapidly now that the kinks were out of his muscles, instinctively finding a way of least resistance between stiff scratchy twigs of heather. He meant to check out a place or three for suitability before getting on back to the den to see if anybody else was awake.

Jenny Shepherd, as she tramped along, watched the roke roll toward her with almost as little concern. Years ago on her very first walking tour of Yorkshire, Jenny, underequipped and uncertain of her route, had lost her way in a thick dripping fog long and late enough to realize exactly how much danger she might have been in. But the footpath across Great and Little Hograh Moors was plain, though wetter than it might have been, a virtual gully cut through the slight snow and marked with

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cairns, and having crossed it more than once before Jenny knew exactly where she was. Getting to the hostel would not be too difficult even in the dark, and anyway she was equipped today to deal with any sort of weather.

In order to cross a small stone bridge the path led steeply down into a stream bed. Impulsively Jenny decided to take a break there, sheltered somewhat from the wind's incessant keening, before the roke should swallow her up. She shrugged off her backpack, leaned it upright against the bridge, and pulled out one insulating pad of blue foam to sit on and another to use as a backrest, a thermos, a small packet of trail gorp, half a sandwich in a baggie, a space blanket, and a voluminous green nylon poncho. She was dressed already in coated nylon rain pants over pile pants over soft woolen longjohns, plus several thick sweaters and a parka, but the poncho would help keep out the wet and wind and add a layer of insulation.

Jenny shook out the space blanket and wrapped herself up in it, shiny side inward. Then she sat, awkward in so much bulkiness, and adjusted the foam rectangles behind and beneath her until they felt right. The thermos was still half full of tea; she unscrewed the lid and drank from it directly, replacing the lid after each swig to keep the cold out. There were ham and cheese in the sandwich and unsalted peanuts, raisins, and chunks of plain chocolate in the gorp.

Swathed in her space blanket, propped against the stone buttress of the bridge, Jenny munched and guzzled, one glove off and one glove on, in a glow of the well-being that ensues upon vigorous exercise in the cold, pleasurable fatigue, solitude, simple creature comforts, and the smug relish of being on top of a situation that would be too tough for plenty of other people (her own younger self, for one). The little beck poured noisily beneath the bridge's span and down toward the dale and the trees below; the wind blew, but not on Jenny. She sat there tucked into the landscape, in a daze of pure contentment.

The appearance overhead of the first wispy tendrils of mist merely deepened her sense of comfort, and she sat on, knowing it would very soon be time to pack up and go but reluctant to bring the charm of the moment to a close.

A sheep began to come down the stream bed above where Jenny sat, a blackface ewe, one of the mountain breeds—Swaledale, would it be? Or Herdwick? No, Herdwicks were a Lake District breed. With idle interest she watched it scramble down jerkily, at home here, not hurrying and doubtless as cozy in its poncho of dirty fleece as Jenny was herself in her Patagonia pile. She watched it lurch toward her, knocking the stones in its descent—and abruptly found herself thinking of the albino deer in the park at home in Pennsylvania: how when glimpsed it had

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seemed half-deer, half-goat, with a deer's tail that lifted and waved as it walked or leapt away, and a prick-eared full-face profile exactly like the other deer's; yet it had moved awkwardly on stubby legs and was the wrong color, grayish-white with mottling on the back.

This sheep reminded her somehow of the albino deer, an almost-but-not-quite right sort of sheep. Jenny had seen a lot of sheep, walking the English uplands. Something about this one was definitely funny. Were its legs too *thick?* Did it move oddly? With the fog swirling more densely every second it was hard to say just *what* the thing looked like. She strained forward, trying to see.

For an instant the mist thinned between them, and she perceived with a shock that the sheep was *carrying something in its mouth.*

At Jenny's startled movement the ewe swung its dead flat eyes upon her—froze—whirled and plunged back up the way it had come. As it wheeled it emitted a choked high wheeze, perhaps sheeplike, and dropped its bundle.

Jenny pushed herself to her feet, dis-cocooned herself from the space blanket, and clambered up the steep streambed. The object the sheep had dropped had rolled into the freezing water; she thrust in her ungloved right hand—gritting her teeth—and pulled it out. The thing was a dead grouse with a broken neck.

Now Jenny Shepherd, despite her name, was extremely ignorant of the personal habits of sheep. But they were grazing animals, not carnivores—even a baby knew that. Maybe the sheep had found the dead grouse and picked it up. Sheep might very well do that sort of thing, pick up carrion and walk around with it, for all Jenny knew. But she shivered, heaved the grouse back into the water and stuck her numb wet hand inside her coat. Maybe sheep *did* do that sort of thing; but she had the distinct impression that something creepy had happened, and her mood was spoiled.

Nervously now she looked at her watch. Better get a move on. She slipped and slid down to the bridge and repacked her pack in haste. There were four or five miles of open moor yet to be crossed before she would strike a road, and the fog was going to slow her down some. Before heaving the pack back on Jenny unzipped one of its outside pockets and took out a flashlight.

Elphi crashed across the open moor, beside himself. How *could* he have been so careless? Failing to spot the walker was bad enough, yet if he had kept his head all would have been well; nobody can swear to what they see in a fog with twilight coming on. But dropping the grouse, that was unpardonable. For a hundred and fifty years the success of the concealment had depended on unfaltering vigilance and presence of mind,

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and he had demonstrated neither. That he had just woken up from the winter's sleep, that his mind was burdened with trouble and grief, that walkers on the moors were scarcer than sunshine at this month and hour—none of it excused his incredible clumsiness. Now he had not one big problem to deal with, but two.

The old fellow groaned and swung his head from side to side, but there was no help for what he had to do. He circled back along the way he'd come so as to intersect the footpath half a mile or so east of the bridge. The absence of boot tracks in the snow there had to mean that the walker was heading in this direction, toward Westerdale, and would presently pass by.

He settled himself in the heather to wait; and minutes later, when the dark shape bulked out of the roke, he stepped upright into the path and blocked it. Feeling desperately strange, for he had not spoken openly to a human being in nearly two centuries, Elphi said hoarsely: "Stop reet theear, lad, an' don't tha treea ti run," and when a loud, startled *Oh!* burst from the walker, "Ah'll deea thee nae ho't, but thoo mun cum wiv me noo." His Yorkshire dialect was as thick as clotted cream.

The walker in its flapping garment stood rigid in the path before him. "What—I don't—I can't understand what you're *saying!*"

A woman! And an American! Elphi knew an American accent when he heard one, from the wireless, but he had *never* spoken with an American in all his life—nor with *any* sort of woman, come to that. What would an American woman be *doing* up here at this time of year, all on her own? But he pulled his wits together and replied carefully, "Ah said, ye'll have to cum wiv me. Don't be frighted, an' don't try to run off. No harm will cum ti ye."

The woman, panting and obviously badly frightened despite his words, croaked, "What in God's name *are* you?"

Elphi imagined the small, naked, elderly, hair-covered figure he presented, with his large hands and feet and bulging, knobby features, the whole wrapped up in a dirty sheepskin, and said hastily, "Ah'll tell ye that, aye, but nut noo. We's got a fair piece of ground ti kivver."

Abruptly the walker unfroze. She made some frantic movements beneath her huge garment and a bulky pack dropped out onto the ground, so that she instantly appeared both much smaller and much more maneuverable. Elphi made himself ready to give chase, but instead of fleeing she asked, "Have you got a gun?"

"A *gun* saidst 'ee?" It was Elphi's turn to be startled. "Neea, but iv thoos's na—if ye won't gang on yer own feet Ah'll bring thee along masen. Myself, that's to say. But Ah'd rather not, t'would be hard on us both. Will ye cum then?"

"This is *crazy! No,* dammit!" The woman eyed Elphi blocking the trail,

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then glanced down at her pack, visibly figuring the relative odds of getting past him with or without it. Suddenly, dragging the pack by one shoulder strap, she was advancing upon him. "Get out of the way!"

At this Elphi groaned and swung his head. "Mistress, tha mun cum, and theear's an end," he exclaimed desperately, and darting forward he gripped her wrist in his large knobbly sheepskin-padded hand. "Noo treea if tha can break loose."

But the woman refused to struggle, and in the end Elphi had no choice but to yank her off her feet and along the sloppy footpath for a hundred yards or so, ignoring the noises she made. He left her sitting in the path rubbing her wrist, and went back for the pack, which he shouldered himself. Then, without any more talk, they set off together into the fog.

By the time they arrived at the abandoned jet mine which served the hobs for a winter den, Jenny's tidy mind had long since shut itself down. Fairly soon she had stopped being afraid of Elphi, but the effort of grappling with the disorienting strangeness of events was more than her brain could manage. She was hurt and exhausted, and more than exhausted. Already, when Elphi in his damp fleece had reared up before her in the fog and blocked her way, she had had a long day. These additional hours of bushwhacking blindly through the tough mist-soaked heather in the dark had drained her of all purpose and thought beyond that of surviving the march.

Toward the end, as it grew harder and harder for her to lift her peat-clogged boots clear of the heather, she'd kept tripping and falling down. Whenever that happened her odd, dangerous little captor would help her up quite gently, evidently with just a tiny fraction of his superhuman strength.

Earlier, she had remembered seeing circus posters in the Middlesbrough station while changing from her London train; maybe, she'd thought, the little man was a clown or "circus freak" who had run off into the hills. But that hadn't seemed very probable; and later, when another grouse exploded under their feet like a feathered grenade, and the dwarf had pounced in a flash upon it and broken its neck—a predator that efficient—she'd given the circus idea up for a more terrifying one: maybe he was an escaped inmate of a mental hospital. Yet Elphi himself, in spite of everything, was somehow unterrifying.

But Jenny had stopped consciously noticing and deciding things about him quite a long while before they got where they were going; and when she finally heard him say "We's heear, lass," and saw him bend to ease back the stone at the entrance to the den, her knees gave way, and she flopped down sideways into the vegetation.

She awoke to the muted sound of a radio.

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She lay on a hard surface, wrapped snugly in a sheepskin robe, smelly and heavy but marvelously warm. For some moments she basked in the comforting warmth, soothed by the normalness of the radio's voice; but quite soon she came fully awake and knew—with a sharp jolt of adrenalin—what had happened and where she must be now.

Jenny lay in what appeared to be a small cave, feebly lit by a stubby white "emergency" candle—one of her own, in fact. The enclosure was stuffy but not terribly so, and the candle burned steadily where it stood on a rough bench or table, set in what looked to be (and was) an aluminum pie-plate of the sort snack pies are sold in. The radio was nowhere in sight.

Someone had undressed her; she was wearing her sheet sleeping bag for a nightie and nothing else.

Tensely Jenny turned her head and struggled to take mental possession of the situation. The cave was lined with bunks like the one in which she lay, and in each of these she could just make out . . . forms. Seven of them, all evidently deep in sleep (or cold storage?) and, so far as she could tell, all creatures like the one that had kidnapped her. As she stared Jenny began to breathe in gasps again, and the fear which had faded during the march returned in full strength. *What was this place? What was going to happen to her? What the hell was it all about?*

The first explanation that occurred to her was also the most menacing: that she had lost her own mind, that her unfinished therapeutic business had finally caught up with her. If the little man had not escaped from an institution, then maybe she was on her own way to one. In fact Jenny's record of mental stability, while not without an average number of weak points, contained no hint of anything like hallucinations or drug-related episodes. But in the absence of a more obvious explanation her confidence on this score was just shaky enough to give weight and substance to such thoughts.

To escape them (and the panic they engendered) Jenny applied herself desperately to solving some problems both practical and pressing. It was cold in the cave; she could see her breath. Her bladder was bursting. A ladder against one wall disappeared into a hole in the ceiling, and as the cave appeared to have no other entryway she supposed the ladder must lead to the outside world, where now for several reasons she urgently wished to be. She threw off the robe and wriggled out of the sleeping-bag—catching her breath at the pain from dozens of sore muscles and bruises—and crippled across the stone floor barefoot; but the hole was black as night and airless, not open, at the top. Jenny was a prisoner, naked and in need.

Well, then, find something—a bucket, a pan, anything! Poking about, in the nick of time she spotted her backpack in the shadows of the far

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wall. In it was a pail of soft plastic meant for carrying water, which Jenny frantically grubbed out and relieved herself into. Half-full, the pail held its shape and could be stood, faintly steaming, against the wall. Shuddering violently, she then snatched bundles of clothes and food out of the pack and rushed back into bed. In point of fact there wasn't all that much in the way of extra clothing: one [redacted] woolen boot socks, clean underwear, slippers, a cotton turtleneck [redacted] spare sweater. No pants, no shoes, no outerwear; she wouldn't get [redacted] over the open moor without any of those. Still, she gratefully pulled on what she found and felt immensely better; nothing restores a sense of confidence in one's mental health, and some sense of control over one's situation, like dealing effectively with a few basic needs. Thank God her kidnapper had brought the pack along!

Next Jenny got up again and climbed to the top of the ladder; but the entrance was closed by a stone far too heavy to move.

The radio sat in a sort of doorless cupboard, a tiny transistor in a dimpled red plastic case. BOOTS THE CHEMIST was stamped on the front in gold, and a wire ran from the extended tip of its antenna along one side of the ladder, up the hole. Jenny brought it back into bed with her, taking care not to disconnect the wire.

She was undoing the twisty on her plastic bag of food when there came a scraping, thumping noise from above and a shaft of daylight shot down the hole. Then it was dark again, and legs—whitish hair-covered legs—and the back of a gray fleece came into view. Frozen where she sat, Jenny waited, heart thumping.

The figure that turned to face her at the bottom of the ladder looked by candlelight exactly like a very old, very small gnome of a man, covered with hair—crown, beard, body and all—save for his large hands and feet in pads of fleece. But this was a superficial impression. The arms were longer and the legs shorter than they should have been; and Jenny remembered how this dwarf had ranged before her on four limbs in the fog, looking as much like a sheep as he now looked like a man. She thought again of the albino deer.

They contemplated one another. Gradually, outlandish as he looked, Jenny's fear drained away again and her pulse rate dropped back to normal. Then the dwarf seemed to smile. "It's a bright morning, the roke's burned off completely," he said, in what was almost BBC English with only the faintest trace of Yorkshire left in the vowels.

Jenny said, calmly enough, "Look: I don't understand any of this. First of all I want to know if you're going to let me go."

She got an impression of beaming and nodding. "Oh yes indeed!"

"When?"

"This afternoon. Your clothes should be dry in time, I've put them out

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in the sun. It's a rare bit of luck, our getting a sunny morning." He unfastened the sheepskin as he spoke and hung it from a peg next to a clump of others, then slipped off his moccasins and mitts and put them on the shelf where the radio had stood. Except for his hair he wore nothing.

Abruptly Jenny's mind skittered away, resisting this strangeness. She shut her eyes, unafraid of the hairy creature but overwhelmed by the situation in which he was the central figure. "Won't you please explain to me what's going on? Who are you? Who are *they*? What is this place? Why did you make me come here? Just—what's going *on*?" Her voice went up steeply, near to breaking.

"Yes, I'll tell you all about it now, and when you've heard me out I hope you'll understand what happened yesterday—why it was necessary." He dragged a stool from under the table and perched on it, then quickly hopped up again. "Now, have you enough to eat? I'm afraid we've nothing at all to offer a guest at this time of year, apart from the grouse—but we can't make any sort of fire in this clear weather and I very much doubt you'd enjoy eating her raw. I brought her back last night in case anyone else was awake and hungry, which they're unfortunately not . . . but let me see: I've been through your pack quite thoroughly, I'm afraid, and I noticed some packets of dehydrated soup and tea and so forth; now suppose we were to light several more of these excellent candles and bunch them together, couldn't we boil a little pot of water over the flames? I expect you're feeling the cold." As he spoke the old fellow bustled about—rummaged in the pack for pot and candles, filled the pot half full of water from Jenny's own canteen, lit the candles from the burning one, and arranged supports for the pot to rest on while the water heated. He moved with a speed and economy that were so remarkable as to be almost funny, a cartoon figure whisking about the cave. "There now! You munch a few biscuits while we wait, and I'll do my best to begin to clear up the mystery."

Jenny had sat mesmerized while her abductor rattled on, all the time dashing to and fro. Now she took tea, sugar, dried milk, two envelopes of Knorr's oxtail soup, and a packet of flat objects called Garibaldis here in England but raisin cookies by Nabisco (and squashed-fly biscuits by the children in *Swallows and Amazons*). She was famished, and lulled into calmness as the old fellow contrived to sound more and more like an Oxbridge don providing a student with fussy hospitality in his rooms in college. She had not forgotten the sensation of being dragged as by a freight train along the footpath, but was willing to set the memory aside. "What became of your accent? Last night I could barely understand you—or are you the same one that brought me in?"

"Oh aye, that was me. As I said, none of the others is awake." He

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glanced rather uneasily at the row of shadowy cots. "Though it's getting to be high time they were. Actually, what's happened is that most of the time you were sleeping, I've been swotting up on my Standard English. I used the wireless, you see. Better switch it off now, actually, if you don't mind," he added. "Our supply of batteries is very, ah, irregular and where should *we* be now if there hadn't been any left last night, eh?" Silently Jenny clicked off the red radio and handed it to him, and he tucked it carefully back into its cubby. Then he reseated himself upon the stool, looking expectant.

Jenny swallowed half a biscuit and objected, "How can you totally change your accent and your whole style of speaking in one night, just by listening to the radio? It's not possible."

"Not for you, of course not, no, no. But we're *good* at languages, you see. Very, very good; it's the one thing in us that our masters valued most."

At this Jenny's wits reeled again, and she closed her eyes and gulped hard against nausea, certain that unless some handle on all this weirdness were provided *right away* she might start screaming helplessly and not be able to stop. She *could not* go on chatting with this Santa's elf for another second. Jenny Shepherd was a person who was never comfortable unless she felt she understood things; to understand is, to some extent, to have control over. "Please," she pleaded, "just tell me who or what you are and what's happening here. Please."

At once the old fellow jumped up again. "If I may—" he murmured apologetically and peered again into the treasure trove of Jenny's backpack. "I couldn't help noticing that you're carrying a little book I've seen before—yes, here it is." He brought the book back to the table and the light: the Dalesman paperback guide to the Cleveland Way. Swiftly finding the page he wanted he passed the book over to Jenny, who got up eagerly from the bed, holding the robe around her, to read by candlelight:

> The Cleveland area is extremely rich in folklore which goes back to Scandinavian sources and often very much further. Perhaps the hobs, those strange hairy little men who did great deeds—sometimes mischievous, sometimes helpful—were in some way a memory of those ancient folk who lingered on in parts of the moors almost into historic times. In the years between 1814 and 1823 George Calvert gathered together stories still remembered by old people. He lists 23 "Hobmen that were commonly held to live hereabout," including the famous Farndale Hob, Hodge Hob of Bransdale, Hob of Tarn Hole, Dale Town Hob of Hawnby, and Hob of Hasty Bank. Even his list misses out others which are remembered, such as Hob Hole Hob of Runswick who was supposed to cure the whooping cough. Calvert also gives a list of witches. . . .

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But this was no help, it made things worse! "You're telling me you're a *hob?*" she blurted, aghast. What nightmarish fantasy was this? "Hob . . . as in hobbit?" However dearly Jenny might love Tolkien's masterpiece, the idea of having spent the night down a hobbit-hole—in the company of seven dwarves!—was completely unacceptable. In the real world hobbits and dwarves must be strictly metaphorical, and Jenny preferred to live in the real world all the time.

The odd creature continued to watch her. "Hob as in hobbit? Oh, very likely. Hob as in hobgoblin, most assuredly—but as to whether *we* are hobs, the answer is yes and no." He took the book from her and laid it on the table. "Sit down, my dear, and bundle up again; and shall I pour out?" for the water had begun to sizzle against the sides of the little pot.

"What did you mean, yes *and* no?" Jenny asked a bit later, sitting up in bed with a steaming Sierra Club cup of soup balanced in her lap and a plastic mug of tea in her hands, and thinking: This better be good.

"First, may I pour myself a cup? It's a long story," he said, "and it's best to begin at the beginning. My name is Elphi, by the way.

"At least the dale folk called me Elphi until I scarcely remembered my true name, and it was the same with all of us—we took the names they gave us and learnt to speak their language so well that we spoke no other even amongst ourselves.

"This is the whole truth, though you need not believe it. My friends and myself were in service aboard an exploratory vessel from another star. Hear me out," for Jenny had made an impatient movement, "I said you need not believe what I tell you. The ship called here, at Earth, chiefly for supplies but also for information. Here, of course, we knew already that only one form of life had achieved mastery over nature. Often that is the case, but on my world there were two, and one subordinate to the other. Our lords the Gafr were physically larger than we, and technologically gifted as we were not, and also they did not hibernate; that gave them an advantage, though their lives were shorter (and that gave *us* one). We think the Gafr had been with us, and over us, from the first, when we both were still more animal than thinking thing. Our development, you see, went hand in hand with theirs but their gift was mastery and ours was service—always, from our prehistory.

"And from our prehistory our lives were intertwined with theirs, for we were of great use to one another. As I've said, we Hefn are very good with languages, at speaking and writing them—and also we are stronger for our size than they, and quicker in every way, though I would have to say less clever. I've often thought that if the Neanderthal people had lived on into modern times their relations with *you* might have developed in a similar way . . . but the Gafr are far less savage than you, and never

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viewed us as competitors, so perhaps I'm wrong. We are very much less closely related than you and the Neanderthal people."

"How come you know so much about the Neanderthalers?" Jenny interrupted to ask.

"From the wireless, my dear! The wireless keeps us up to date. We would be at a sad disadvantage without it, don't you agree?

"So the Gafr—"

"How would you spell that?"

"G, A, F, R. One F, not two, and no E. The Gafr built the starships and we went to work aboard them. It was our life, to be their servants and dependents. You should understand that they never were cruel. Neither we nor they could imagine an existence without the other, after so many eons of relying upon one another.

"Except that aboard my ship, for no reason I can now explain, a few of us became dissatisfied, and demanded that we be given responsibilities of our own. Well, you know, it was as if the sheepdogs hereabouts were one day to complain to the farmers that from now on they wanted flocks of their own to manage, with the dipping and tupping and shearing and lambing and all the rest. Our lords were as dumbfounded as these farmers would be—a talking dog, you see. When we couldn't be reasoned or scolded out of our notion, and it began to interfere with the smooth functioning of the ship, the Gafr decided to put us off here for a while to think things over. They were to come back for us as soon as we'd had time to find out what running our own affairs without them would be like. That was a little more than three hundred and fifty years ago."

Jenny's mouth fell open; she had been following intently. "Three hundred and fifty of your years, you mean?"

"No, of yours. We live a *long* time. To human eyes we appeared very old men when still quite young, but now we are old indeed—and look it too, I fear.

"Well, they put fifteen of us off here, in Yorkshire, and some dozen others in Scandinavia somewhere. I often wonder if any of that group has managed to keep alive, or whether the ship came back for them but not for us—but there's no knowing.

"It was early autumn; we supposed they meant to fetch us off before winter, for they knew the coming of hard winter would put us to sleep. They left us well supplied and went away, and we all had plenty of time to find life without the Gafr as difficult—psychologically, I suppose you might say—as they could possibly have wished. Oh yes! We waited, very chastened, for the ship to return. But the deep snows came and finally we had to go to earth, and when we awoke the following spring we were forced to face the likelihood that we were stranded here.

"A few found they could not accept a life in this alien place without

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the Gafr to direct their thoughts and actions; they died in the first year. But the rest of us, though nearly as despairing, preferred life to death—and we said to one another that the ship might yet return.

"When we awoke from our first winter's sleep, the year was 1624. In those days the high moors were much as you see them now, but almost inaccessible to the world beyond them. The villages were linked by a few muddy cart tracks and stone pannier trods across the tops. No one came up here but people that had business here, or people crossing from one dale into another: farmers, poachers, panniermen, Quakers later on . . . the farmers would come up by turf road from their own holdings to gather bracken for stock bedding, and to cut turf and peat for fuel, and ling—that's what they call the heather hereabouts, you know—for kindling and thatching. They burned off the old ling to improve the grazing, and took away the burned stems for kindling. And they came after bilberries in late summer, and to bring hay to their sheep on the commons in winter, as some still do. But nobody came from outside, passing through from one distant place to another, and the local people were an ignorant, superstitious lot as the world judges such things, shut away up here. They would sit about the hearth of an evening, whole families together, and retell the old tales. And we would hang about the eaves, listening.

"All that first spring we spied out the dales farms, learnt the language and figured our chances. Some of us wanted to go to the dalesmen with our story and ask to be taken into service, for it would have comforted us to serve a good master again. But others—I was one—said such a course was as dangerous as it was useless, for we would not have been believed and the Church would have had us hunted down for devil's spawn.

"Yet we all yearned and hungered so after direction and companionship that we skulked about the farms despite the risk, watching how the men and milkmaids worked. We picked up the knack of it easily enough, of milking and churning and threshing and stacking—the language of farm labor as you might say!—and by and by we began to lend a hand, at night, when the house was sleeping—serving *in secret,* you see. We asked ourselves, would the farmers call us devil's spawn for *that?* and thought it a fair gamble. We'd thresh out the corn, and then we'd fill our pouches with barley and drink the cat's cream off the doorstep for our pay.

"At least we thought it was the cat's cream. But one night in harvesttime, one of us—Hart Hall it was—heard the farmer tell his wife, 'Mind tha leaves t'bate o' cream for t' hob. He deeas mair i' yah neet than a' t'men deea iv a day.' That's how we learnt that the people were in no doubt about who'd been helping them.

"We could scarcely believe our luck. Of course we'd heard talk of

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witches and fairies, very superstitious they were in those days, and now and again one would tell a tale of little men called hobmen, part elf, part goblin as it seemed, sometimes kind and sometimes tricksy. They'd put out a bowl of cream for the hob, for if they forgot, the hob would make trouble for them, and if they remembered he would use them kindly."

"That was a common practice in rural Scandinavia too—to set out a bowl of porridge for the *tomte*," Jenny put in."

"Aye? Well, well . . . no doubt the cats and foxes got the cream, before *we* came! Well, we put together every scrap we could manage to overhear about the hobmen, and the more we heard the more our way seemed plain. By great good fortune we looked the part. We *are* man-like, more or less, though we go as readily upon four feet as two, and stood a good deal smaller than the ordinary human even in those days when men were not so tall as now, and that meant no great harm would come of it should we happen to be seen. That was important. There hadn't been so many rumors of hobbish helpfulness in the dales for a very long time, and as curiosity grew we were spied upon in our turn—but I'm getting ahead of my tale.

"By the time a few years had passed we'd settled ourselves all through these dales. Certain farmsteads and local spots were spoken of as being 'haunted bi t'hob'; well, one way and another we found out where they were and one of us would go and live there, and carry on according to tradition. Not all of us did that, now—some just found a farm they liked and moved in. But for instance it was believed that a certain hob, that lived in a cave at Runswick up on the coast, could cure what they called t'kink-cough, so one of us went on up there to be Hob Hole Hob, and when the mothers would bring their sick children and call to him to cure them, he'd do what he could."

"'What *could* he do, though?"

"Not a great deal, but more than nothing. He could make them more comfortable, and unless a child was very ill, he could make it more likely that they would recover."

"How? Herbs and potions?"

"No, not at all—merely the power of suggestion. But quite effective, oh aye.

"There was a tradition too of a hob in Farndale that was the troublesome sort, and as it seemed wisest not to neglect that mischievous side of our ledger altogether, once in a while we would send somebody over there to let out the calves and spill the milk and put a cart on the barn roof, and generally make a nuisance of himself. It kept the old beliefs alive, you see. It wouldn't have done for people to start thinking the hobs had all got good as gold, we had the sense to see that. The dalesfolk used to say, 'Gin t'hobman takes ti yan, ya'r yal reet i' t'lang run, but deea

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he tak agin' 'ee 'tis anither story!' We wanted them to go right on saying that.

"But we did take to them—aye, we did indeed, though the Gafr and the dalesmen were so unlike. The Yorkshire farmer of those times for all his faults was what they call the salt of the earth. They made us good masters, and we served them well for nigh on two hundred years."

Jenny wriggled and leaned toward Elphi, raptly attending. "Did any of you ever *talk* with humans, face to face? Did you ever have any human friends, that you finally told the truth to?"

"No, my dear. We had no friends among humans in the sense you mean, though we befriended a few in particular. Nor did we often speak with humans. We thought it vital to protect and preserve their sense of us as magical and strange—supernatural, in fact. But now and again it would happen.

"I'll tell you of one such occasion. For many and many a year my home was at Hob Garth near Great Fryup Dale, where a family called Stonehouse had the holding. There was a Thomas Stonehouse once, that lived there and kept sheep.

"Now, the time I'm speaking of would have been about 1760 or thereabouts, when Tommy was beginning to get on a bit in years. Somehow he fell out with a neighbor of his called Matthew Bland, an evil-tempered fellow he was, and one night I saw Bland creep along and break the hedge, and drive out Tommy's ewes. Tommy was out all the next day in the wet, trying to round them up, but without much luck for he only found five out of the forty, and so I says to myself: here's a job for Hob. The next morning all forty sheep were back in the field and the hedge patched up with new posts and rails.

"Well! but that wasn't all: when I knew Tommy to be laid up with a cold, and so above suspicion himself, I nipped along and let Bland's cattle loose. A perfectly hobbish piece of work that was! Old Bland, he was a full fortnight rounding them up. Of course, at the time the mischief was done Tommy had been in his bed with chills and a fever, and everybody knew it; but Bland came and broke the new fence anyway and let the sheep out again—he was that furious, he had to do something.

"As Tommy was still too ill to manage, his neighbors turned out to hunt the sheep for him. But the lot of 'em had wandered up onto the tops in a roke like the one we had yesterday evening, and none could be found at all. All the same, that night Hob rounded them up and drove them home, and repaired the fence again. Bear in mind, my dear, that such feats as the farmers deemed prodigious were simple enough for us, for we have excellent sight in the dark, and great strength in the low gravity here, and are quick on our feet, whether four or two.

"Now, four of Tommy's ewes had fallen into a quarry in the roke and

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broken their necks, and never came home again. When he was well enough he walked out to the field to see what was left of the flock and cut some hay for it—this was early spring, I remember, just about this time. We'd waked sooner than usual that year, which was a bit of luck for Tommy. I saw him heading up there, and followed. And when I knew him to be grieving over the four lost ewes I accosted him in the road and said not to fret any more, that the sheep would be accounted for and then some at lambing time—for I knew that most were carrying twins, and I meant to help with the lambing as well, to see that as many as possible would live.

"He took me then for an old man, a bit barmy though kindly intentioned. But later, when things turned out the way I'd said, it was generally talked of—how there was no use Matthew Bland trying to play tricks on Tommy Stonehouse, for the hobman had befriended him, and when t'hobman taks ti yan . . . aye, it was a bit of luck for Tommy that we woke early that spring.

"But to speak directly to a farmer so, that was rare. More often the farmer took the initiative upon himself, or his wife or children or servants did, by slipping out to spy upon us at work, or by coming to beg a cure. There was talk of a hob that haunted a cave in the Mulgrave Woods, for instance. People would put their heads in and shout 'Hob-thrush Hob! Where is thoo?' and the hob was actually meant to reply—and the dear knows how *this* tradition began—'Ah's tyin' on mah lef' fuit shoe, An' Ah'll be wiv thee—noo!' Well, we didn't go as far as that, but once in a while one of us might slip up there for a bit so's to be able to shout back if anyone called into the cave. Most often it was children.

"Mostly, people weren't frightened of t'hob. But as I've said, we thought it as well to keep the magic bright. There was one old chap, name of Gray, with a farm over in Bransdale; he married himself a new wife who couldn't or wouldn't remember to put out the jug of cream at bedtime as the old wife had always done. Well, Hodge Hob, that had helped that family for generations, he pulled out of there and never went back. And another time a family called Oughtred, that farmed over near Upleatham, lost *their* hob because he died. That was Hob Hill Hob, that missed his step and broke his neck in a mine shaft, the first of us all to go out since the very beginning. Well, Kempswithen overheard the Oughtreds discussing it—whyever had the hob gone away?—and they agreed it must have been because one of the workmen had hung his coat on the winnowing machine and forgot it, and the hobman had thought it was left there for *him*—for everyone knew you mustn't offer clothes to fairies and such or they'll take offense.

"Well! We'd been thinking another of us might go and live at Hob Hill Farm, but after that we changed our minds. And when a new milkmaid

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over at Hart Hall spied on Hart Hall Hob and saw him flailing away at the corn one night without a stitch on, and made him a shirt to wear, and left it in the barn, we knew he'd have to leave there too, and he did. One curious thing: the family at Hart Hall couldn't decide whether the hob had been offended because he'd been given the shirt at all, or because it had been cut from coarse cloth instead of fine linen! We know, because they fretted about it for months, and sacked the girl.

"At all events we'd make the point now and then that you mustn't offend the hob or interfere with him or get too close and crowd him, and so we made out pretty well. Still hoping for rescue, you know, but content enough on the whole. We were living all through the dales, north and south, the eleven of us who were left alive—at Runswick, Great Fryup, Commondale, Kempswithen, Hasty Bank, Scugdale, Farndale, Hawnby, Broxa . . . Woof Howe . . . and we'd visit a few in-between places that were said to be haunted by t'hob, like the Mulgrave Cave and Obtrush Rook above Farndale. It was all right.

"But after a longish time things began to change.

"This would be perhaps a hundred and fifty years ago, give or take a couple of decades. Well, I don't know just how it was, but bit by bit the people hereabouts began to be less believing somehow, less sure their grandfathers had really seen the fairies dance on Fairy Cross Plain, or that Obtrush Rook was really and truly haunted by the hobman. And by and by we began to feel that playing hob i' t'hill had ceased to be altogether safe. Even in these dales there were people now that wanted explanations for things, and that weren't above poking their noses into our affairs.

"And so, little by little, we began to withdraw from the farms. For even though we were no longer afraid of being taken for Satan's imps and hunted down, concealment had been our way of getting by for such a very long time that we preferred to go on the same way. But for the first time in many long years we often found ourselves thinking of the ship again and wishing for its return. But I fear the ship was lost.

"Gradually, then, we drew back out of the dales to the high moortops, moved into the winter dens we'd been using right along, and set ourselves to learning how to live up here entirely—to catch grouse and hares, and find eggs and berries, instead of helping ourselves to the farmer's stores. Oh, we were good hunters and we loved these moors already, but still it was a hard and painful time, almost a second exile. I remember how I once milked a ewe—thinking to get some cream—only to find that it was the jug set out for me by the farmer's wife that I wanted and missed, for that was a symbol of my service to a master that respected what I did for him; but a worse time was coming.

"There were mines on the moors since there were people in the land

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at all, but not so very long after we had pulled back up out of the dales altogether, ironstone began to be mined in Rosedale on a larger scale than ever before, and they built a railroad to carry the ore right round the heads of Rosedale and Farndale and down to Battersby Junction. I daresay you know the right of way now as a footpath, my dear, for part of it lies along the route of the Lyke Wake Walk. But in the middle of the last century men came pouring onto the high moors to build the railroad. Some even lived up here, in shacks, while the work was ongoing. And more men poured across the moors from the villages all round about, to work in the Rosedale pits, and then there was no peace at all for us, and no safety.

"That was when we first were forced to go about by day in sheepskin.

"It was Kempswithen's idea, he was a clever one! The skins weren't too difficult to get hold of, for sheep die of many natural causes, and also they are easily killed, though we never culled more than a single sheep from anyone's flock, and then always an old ewe or a lame one, of little value. It went against the grain to rob the farmers at all, but without some means of getting about by daylight we could not have managed. The ruse worked well, for nearly all the railroad workers and miners came here from outside the dales, and were unobservant about the ways of sheep, and we were careful.

"But the noise and smoke and peacelessness drove us away from our old haunts onto the bleakest part of the high moors where the fewest tracks crossed. We went out there and dug ourselves in.

"It was a dreary time. And the mines had scarcely been worked out and the railroad dismantled when the Second War began, and there were soldiers training on Rudland Rigg above Farndale, driving their tanks over Obtrush Rook till they had knocked it to bits, and over Fylingdales Moor, where we'd gone to escape the miners and the trains."

"Fylingdales, where the Early Warning System is now?"

"Aye, that's the place. During the war a few planes made it up this far, and some of the villages were hit. We slept through a good deal of that, luckily—we'd found this den by then, you see, an old jet working that a fox had opened. But it was uneasy sleep, it did us little good. Most particularly, it was not good for us to be of no use to any master—that began to do us active harm, and we were getting old. Two of us died before the war ended, another not long after. And still the ship did not return."

Something had been nagging at Jenny. "Couldn't you have reproduced yourselves after you came up here? You know—formed a viable community of hobs in hiding. Kept your spirits up."

"No, my dear. Not in this world. It wasn't possible, we knew it from the first, you see."

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"Why wasn't it possible?" But Elphi firmly shook his head; this was plainly a subject he did not wish to pursue. Perhaps it was too painful. "Well, so now there are only eight of you?"

"Seven," said Elphi. "When I woke yesterday Woof Howe was dead. I'd been wondering what in the world to do with him when I so stupidly allowed you to see me."

Jenny threw the shadowed bunks a startled glance, wondering which contained a corpse. But something else disturbed her more. "You surely can't mean to say that in the past hundred and fifty years not one of you has ever been caught off-guard, until yesterday!"

Elphi gave the impression of smiling, though he did not really smile. "Oh, no, my dear. One or another of us has been caught napping a dozen times or more, especially in the days since the Rosedale mines were opened. Quite a few folk have sat just where you're sitting and listened, as you've been listening, to much the same tale I've been telling *you*. Dear me, yes! Once we rescued eight people from a train stalled in a late spring snowstorm, and we've revived more than one walker in the last stages of hypothermia—that's besides the ones who took us by surprise."

His ancient face peered up at her through scraggly white hair, and Jenny's apprehension grew. "And none of them ever told? It's hard to believe."

"My dear, none of them has ever remembered a thing about it afterwards! Would we take such trouble to keep ourselves hidden, only to tell the whole story to any stranger that happens by? No indeed. It passes the time and entertains our guests, but they always forget. As will you, I promise—but you'll be safe as houses. Your only problem will be accounting for the lost day."

Jenny had eaten every scrap of her emergency food and peed the plastic pail nearly full, and now she huddled under her sheepskin robe by the light of a single fresh candle, waiting for Elphi to come back. He had refused to let her climb up to empty her own slops and fetch back her own laundry. "I'm sorry, my dear, but there's no roke today—that's the difficulty. If ever you saw this place again you would remember it—and besides, you know, it's no hardship for me to do you a service." So she waited, a prisoner beneath the heavy doorway stone, desperately trying to think of a way to prevent Elphi from stealing back her memories of him.

Promising not to tell anybody, ever, had had no effect. ("They all promise, you know, but how can we afford the risk? Put yourself in my place.") She cudgeled her wits: what could she offer him in exchange for being allowed to remember all this? Nothing came. The things the hobs

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needed—a different social order on Earth, the return of the Gafr ship, the Yorkshire of three centuries ago—were all beyond her power to grant.

Jenny found she believed Elphi's tale entirely: that he had come to Earth from another world, that he would not harm her in any way, that he could wipe the experience of himself from her mind—as effortlessly as she might wipe a chalkboard with a wet rag—by "the power of suggestion," just as Hob Hole Hob had "cured" the whooping cough by the power of suggestion. Somewhere in the course of the telling both skepticism and terror had been neutralized by a conviction that the little creature was speaking the unvarnished truth. She had welcomed this conviction. It was preferable to the fear that she had gone stark raving mad; but above and beyond all that she did believe him.

And all at once she had an idea that just might work. At least it seemed worth trying; she darted across the stone floor and scrabbled frantically in a pocket of her pack. There was just enough time. She burrowed back beneath the sheepskin robe where Elphi had left her with only seconds to spare.

The old hob backed down the ladder with her pail flopping from one hand and her bundle of clothes clutched in the opposite arm, and this time he left the top of the shaft open to the light and cold and the wuthering of the wind. He had tied his sheepskin on again. "Time to suit up now, I think—we want to set you back in the path at the same place and time of day." He scanned the row of sleepers anxiously and seemed to sigh.

Jenny's pile pants and wool socks were nearly dry, her sweaters, long-johns, and boots only dampish. She threw off the sheepskins and began to pull on the many layers of clothing one by one. "I was wondering," she said as she dressed, "I wanted to ask you, how could the hobs just *leave* a farm where they'd been in secret service for maybe a hundred years?"

Elphi's peculiar flat eyes peered at her mildly. "Our bond was to the serving, you see. There were always other farms where extra hands were needed. What grieved us was to leave the dales entirely."

No bond to the people they served, then; no friendship, just as he had said. But all the same— "Why couldn't you come out of hiding now? I know it could be arranged! People all over the world would give anything to know about you!"

Elphi seemed both amused and sad. "No, my dear. Put it out of your mind. First, because we must wait here so long as any of us is left alive, in case the ship should come. Second, because we love these moors and would not leave them. Third, because here on Earth we have always served in secret, and have got too old to care to change our ways. Fourth,

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because if people knew about us we would never again be given a moment's peace. Surely you know that's so."

He was right about the last part anyway; people would never leave them alone, even if the other objections could be answered. Jenny herself didn't want to leave Elphi alone. It was no use.

As she went to mount the ladder the old hob moved to grasp her arm. "I'm afraid I must ask you to wear this," he said apologetically. "You'll be able to see, but not well. Well enough to walk. Not well enough to recognize this place again." And reaching up he slipped a thing like a deathcap over her head and fastened it loosely but firmly around her neck. "The last person to wear this was a shopkeeper from Bristol. Like you, he saw more than he should have seen, and was our guest for a little while one summer afternoon."

"When was that? Recently?"

"Between the wars, my dear."

Jenny stood, docile, and let him do as he liked with her. As he stepped away, "Which was the hob that died?" she asked through the loose weave of the cap.

There was a silence. "Woof Howe Hob."

"What *will* you do with him?"

Another silence, longer this time. "I don't quite know . . . I'd hoped some of the rest would wake up, but the smell . . . it's beginning to trouble me too much to wait. I don't imagine you can detect it."

"Can't you just wake them up?"

"No, they must wake in their own time, more's the pity."

Jenny drew a deep breath. "Why not let *me* help you, then, since there's no one else?"

An even longer silence ensued, and she began to hope. But "You can help me *think* if you like, as we walk along," Elphi finally said, "I don't deny I should be grateful for a useful idea or two, but I must have you on the path by late this afternoon, come what may." And he prodded his captive up the ladder.

Above ground, conversation was instantly impossible. After the den's deep silence the incessant wind seemed deafening. This time Jenny was humping the pack herself, and with the restricted sight and breathing imposed by the cap she found just walking quite difficult enough; she was too sore (and soon too winded) to argue anymore.

After a good long while Elphi said this was far enough, that the cap could come off now and they could have a few minutes' rest. There was nothing to sit on, only heather and a patch of bilberry, so Jenny took off her pack and sat on that, wishing she hadn't eaten every last bit of her supplies. It was a beautiful day, the low sun brilliant on the shaggy,

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snowy landscape, the sky deep and blue, the tiers of hills crisp against one another.

Elphi ran on a little way, scouting ahead. From a short distance, with just his back and head showing above the vegetation, it was astonishing how much he really did move and look like a sheep. She said as much when he came back. "Oh aye, it's a good and proven disguise, it's saved us many a time. Mind you, the farmers are hard to fool. They know their own stock, and they know where theirs and everyone else's ought to be—the flocks are heafed on the commons and don't stray much. 'Heafed,' that means they stick to their own bit of grazing. So we've got to wear a fleece with a blue mark on the left flank if we're going one way and a fleece with red on the shoulder if we're going another, or we'll call attention to ourselves and that's the last thing we want."

"Living *or* dead," said Jenny meaningfully.

"Aye." He gave her a sharp glance. "You've thought of something?"

"Well, all these abandoned mines and quarries, what about putting Woof Howe at the bottom of one of those, under a heap of rubble?"

Elphi said, "There's fair interest in the old iron workings. We decided against mines when we lost Kempswithen."

"What did you do with *him?* You never said."

"Nothing we should care to do again." Elphi seemed to shudder.

"Haven't I heard," said Jenny slowly, "that fire is a great danger up here in early spring? There was a notice at the station, saying that when the peat gets really alight it'll burn for weeks."

"We couldn't do that!" He seemed truly shocked. "Nay, such fires are dreadful things! Nothing at all will grow on the burned ground for fifty years and more."

"But they burn off the old heather, you told me so yourself."

"Controlled burning that is, closely watched."

"Oh." They sat silent for a bit, while Jenny thought and Elphi waited. "Well, what about this: I know a lot of bones and prehistoric animals, cave bears and Irish elk and so on—*big* animals—were found in a cave at the edge of the Park somewhere, but there haven't been any finds like that on the moors because the acid in the peat completely decomposes everything. I was reading an article about it. Couldn't you bury your friend in a peat bog?"

Elphi pondered this with evident interest. "Hmmm. It might be possible at that—nowadays it might. Nobody cuts the deep peat for fuel anymore, and bog's poor grazing land. Walkers don't want to muck about in a bog. About the only chaps who like a bog are the ones that come to look at wildflowers, and it's too early for them to be about."

"Are there any bogs inside the fenced-off part of Fylingdales, the part that's closed to the public?"

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Elphi groaned softly, swinging his head. "Ach, Woof Howe did hate it so, skulking in that dreary place. But still, the flowers would have pleased him."

"Weren't there some rare plants found recently inside the fence, because the sheep haven't been able to graze them down in there?"

"Now, that's true," Elphi mused. "They wouldn't disturb the place where the bog rosemary grows. I've heard them going on about the bog rosemary and the marsh andromedas over around May Moss." He glanced at the sun. "Well, I'm obliged to you, my dear. And now we'd best be off. Time's getting on. And I want you to get out your map, and put on your rain shawl now."

"My what?"

"The green hooded thing you were wearing over your other clothes when I found you."

"Oh, the poncho." She dug this out, heaved and hoisted the pack back on and belted it, then managed to haul the poncho on and down over pack and all despite the whipping of the wind, and to snap the sides together. All this took time, and Elphi was fidgeting before she finished. She faced him, back to the wind. "Since I helped solve your problem, how about helping me with mine?"

"And what's that?"

"I want to remember all this, and come back and see you again."

This sent Elphi off into a great fit of moaning and head-swinging. Abruptly he stopped and stood, rigidly upright. "Would you force me to lie to you? What you ask cannot be given, I've told you why."

"I *swear* I wouldn't tell anybody!" But when this set off another groaning fit Jenny gave up. "All right. Forget it. Where is it you're taking me?"

Elphi sank to all fours, trembling a little, but when he spoke his voice sounded ordinary. "To the track across Great Hograh, where we met. Just over there, do you see? The line of cairns?" And sure enough, there on the horizon was a row of tiny cones. "You walk before me now, straight as you can, till you strike the path."

Jenny, map in hand and frustration in heart, obediently started to climb toward the ridge, lifting her boots high and clear of the snow-dusted heather. The wind was now at her back. Where a sheep-track went the right way she followed it until it wandered off-course, then cast about for another; and in this way she climbed at last onto the narrow path. She stopped to catch her breath and admire the view, then headed east, toward the Youth Hostel at Westerdale Hall, with the sun behind her.

For a couple of miles after that Jenny thought of nothing at all except the strange beauty of the scenery, her general soreness and tiredness,

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and the hot, bad dinner she would get in Westerdale. Then, with a slight start, she wondered when the fog had cleared, and why she hadn't noticed. She pulled off the flapping poncho—dry already!—rolled it up, reached behind to stuff it under the pack flap, then retrieved her map in its clear plastic cover from between her knees and consulted it. If that slope directly across the dale was Kempswithen, then she must be about *here,* and so would strike the road into Westerdale quite soon. She would be at the hostel in, oh, maybe an hour, and have a hot bath—hot wash, anyway, the hostel probably wouldn't have such a thing as a bathtub, they hardly ever did—and the biggest dinner she could buy.

"This is our off-season. You're in luck," said the hostel warden. "We were expecting you yesterday. In summer there wouldn't have been a bed in the place, but we're not fully booked tonight so not to worry. Will you be wanting supper?"

"I booked for the fifth," said Jenny a bit severely. "I'm quite sure, because the fifth is my sister's birthday."

"Right. But the fifth was yesterday; this is the sixth." He put his square finger on a wall calendar hanging behind him. "Thursday, April the sixth. All right?"

"It's Wednesday the fifth," said Jenny patiently, wondering how this obvious flake had convinced the Youth Hostel Association to hire him for a position of responsibility. She held out her wrist so he could read the day and date.

He glanced at the watch. "As a matter of fact it says Thursday the sixth. But it's quite all right, you'll get a bed. Now what about supper, yes or no? There's people waiting to sign in."

Jenny stared at the little squares on the face of her watch and felt her own face begin to burn. "Sorry, I guess I made a mistake. Ah—yes, please, I definitely do want supper." A couple of teenage boys, waiting in the queue behind her, were looking at her strangely; she fumbled out of her boots, slung them into the bootrack, hoisted up her pack, and with all the dignity she could summon up proceeded toward the dormitory she'd been assigned to.

Safe in the empty dorm she picked a bed and sat on it, dumping her pack on the floor beside her. "I left Cambridge on the third," she said aloud. "I stayed two nights in York. I got on the Middlesbrough train this morning, changed there for Whitby, got off at Kildale, and walked over the tops to Westerdale. How and where in tarnation did I manage to lose a day?"

On impulse she got out her seat ticket for the Inter-City train. The seat had been booked for the third. The conductor had looked at and

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punched the ticket. Nobody else had tried to sit in the same seat. There could be no reasonable likelihood of a mistake about the day.

Yet her watch, which two days ago had said Monday, April 3, now said Thursday, April 6. Where could the missing day have gone?

But there was no one to tell her, and the room was cold. Jenny came back to the present: she needed hot water, food, clean socks, her slippers, and (for later) several more blankets on her bed. She wrestled her pack around, opened it, and pulled out her towel and soap box; but her spare pair of boot socks was no longer clean. In fact, it had obviously been worn hard. Both socks were foot-shaped, stuck full of little twiglets of heather, and just slightly damp.

The prickly bits of heather made Jenny realize that the socks she was wearing were prickly as well. She stuck a finger down inside the prickliest sock to work the bits of heather loose, giving this small practical problem all her attention so as to hold panic at bay.

The prickle in her right sock was not heather, but a small piece of paper folded up tight. Hands shaking, Jenny opened the scrap of paper and spread it flat on her thigh. It was a Lipton teabag wrapper, scribbled over with a pen on the non-printed side, in her own handwriting. The scribble said:

> hob called ELFY (?)—caught me in fog, made me come home with him—disguised as *sheep*—lives in hole with 6 others—*hobs are aliens*—he'll make me forget but TRY TO REMEMBER—Danby High Moor?/Bransdale?/Farndale?—KEEP TRYING, DON'T GIVE UP!!!

These words, obviously penned in frantic haste, meant nothing whatever to Jenny. What was a hob? Yet she had written this herself, no question.

Her mind did a slow cartwheel. The sixth of April. Thursday, not Wednesday.

Jenny folded up the scrap of paper and stowed it carefully in her wallet. Methodically then she went through the pack. The emergency food packet had gone, vanished. So had the flashlight, and the candles. The spare shirt and underwear that ought to have been fresh were not. Her little aluminum mess kit pot, carefully soaped for easy cleaning through so many years of camping trips, had been blackened with smoke on the bottom.

Something inexplicable had happened and Jenny had forgotten what it was—been made to forget, apparently; and to judge by this message from out of the lost day she had considered it well worth remembering.

All right then, she decided, hunched aching and grubby on a hard bed in that cold, empty room, the thing to do was to follow instructions and not give up. Trust her own judgment. Keep faith with herself, even if it took years.

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It did take years, but Jenny never gave up. She returned as often to the North York Moors National Park as summers, semester breaks, and sabbaticals permitted, coming to know Danby High Moor, and Bransdale and Farndale, and *their* moors, as well as a foreign visitor could possibly know them in every season; and each visit made her love that rugged country better. In time she became a regular guest at a farm in Danby Dale that did bed-and-breakfast for people on holiday, and never again needed to sleep in Westerdale Hall.

The wish to unriddle the mystery of the missing April 5 retained its strength and importance without, luckily, becoming obsessive, and this fact confirmed Jenny's instinctive sense that when she had scribbled that note to herself she had been afraid only of forgetting, not of the thing to be forgotten. She wanted the lost memories back, not in order to confront and exorcise them, but to repossess something of value that rightfully belonged to her.

But Elphi's powers of suggestion were exceptional. Try as she might, Jenny could not recapture what had happened. Diligent research did uncover a great deal of information about hobs (including the correct spelling of Elphi's name, for he had been famous in his day). And Jenny also made it her business to learn what she could about people who believed themselves to have been captured and examined by aliens (for instance, they are drawn back again and again to the scene of the close encounter). Many of these people had clearly been traumatized, and were afterwards tormented by their inability to remember what had happened to them. Following their example, in case it might help, Jenny eventually sat through a few sessions with a hypnotist; but whether because her participation was half-hearted or because Elphi's skills were of a superior sort, she could remember nothing.

None of Jenny's efforts, in fact, produced the results she actively desired and sought. They did have the wholly unlooked-for result of finding her a husband, and a new and better home.

Frank Flintoft at forty-eight had flyaway white hair and a farmer's stumping gait, but also wide-awake blue eyes in a curiously innocent face. His parents were very old friends of John and Rita Dowson, whose farm in Danby Dale had become Jenny's hob-hunting base in Yorkshire. Frank had grown up on his family's farm in Westerdale, gone off to Cambridge on a scholarship, then returned to take a lease on a place near Swainby, just inside the Park boundary, and settle down to breeding blackface sheep.

The Dowsons had spoken of this person to Jenny with a mixture of admiration and dubiety. A local boy that went away to University rarely came back. Frank *had* come back—but with Ideas, and also with a young

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bride who had left for London before the first year was out; and the Dowsons frowned upon divorce. Frank would use no chemicals, not even to spray his bracken, which put John Dowson's back up. For another thing, he went in for amateur archeology—with the blessing of the County Archeologists for half the North Riding—and was known to the Archeology Departments at the Universities of York and Leeds. And with it all, more often than not Frank's Swaledale gimmer lambs took Best of Breed at the annual Danby Show.

This paragon and Jenny were introduced on one of her summer junkets. The two hit it off immediately, saw a lot of each other whenever Jenny was in Yorkshire, but were not quick to marry. Frank had first to convince himself that Jenny truly loved the moor country for its own sake, and could be trusted not to leave it, before he was prepared to risk a second marriage; but Jenny, to her own surprise, felt wholly willing to exchange her old life for Frank, a Yorkshire sheep farm at the moors' edge, with a two hundred-year-old stone farmhouse, and part-time teaching at York University.

Not until six months after the wedding did Jenny tell her husband about the hob named Elphi. They had finished their evening meal and were sitting at the kitchen table before the electric fire, and at a certain point in the bizarre narrative Frank put his thick hand over hers. "I've heard of Elphi myself," he said thoughtfully when she had finished. "Well, and so that's what really brought you back here, year after year . . . you've still got the note you wrote yourself, I expect." Jenny had had the teabag wrapper laminated, years before. Wordless she went to her room to fetch it, and wordless he read what she had written there.

"Can *you* suggest an explanation?" she finally asked.

Frank shook his head. "But I know one thing. Ancient places have got lives of their own. There's 3,500 years of human settlement on these moors, love. When I'm working on one of the ancient sites I often feel anything at all might happen up there. Almost anything," he amended; "I'm not happy thinking of the hobs as spacemen from somewhere else—I've been hearing tales of Hob all my life, you know. He belongs to our own folklore. I'd prefer to find an explanation closer to home."

"Well anyway, then, you won't think me barmy to go on trying to solve the mystery? It's the one *truly* extraordinary thing that ever happened to me," she added apologetically.

Frank grinned and shook his head again. "You didn't by any chance marry me for convenience, did you—in order to get on with the search?"

"Not *only* for that," said Jenny in relief, and hugged her tolerant and broad-minded husband.

But more years went by, and gradually she forgot to think about Elphi at all. Her quest had brought her a life which suited her so perfectly,

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and absorbed her so entirely, that in the end there was too little dissatisfaction left in Jenny to fuel the search for a solution to the puzzle.

One early summer morning, five years after she had come to live with Frank, the two of them—as they frequently did—took the Land Rover and a hamper of sandwiches up to the tops, for a day of archeology and botanizing. Over a period of several months Frank had been surveying several minor Bronze Age sites between Nab Farm and Blakey Topping, just outside the southern boundary of the four-square-mile forbidden zone of the Early Warning System on Fylingdales Moor. Private land within the Park was thickly strewn with these ancient sites, mostly cairns and field systems. Many had still not been officially identified, and quite a few of the landowners were unaware of their existence. The Park Committee were only too happy to accept Frank's skilled, and free, assistance with the mapping and recording of the less important sites, and Frank enjoyed the work. But the painstaking patience it required was more in his line than Jenny's; she preferred to poke about in the bogland of Nab Farm and nearby May Moss.

On this day she left Frank setting up his equipment under a gray ceiling of cloud, and hiked off briskly through a spur of afforested land to see whether the marsh andromeda had bloomed. An hour and a half later she reappeared, stumbling and panting, to drag a startled Frank away from his work, back through the narrow bit of pine plantation to the stretch of bog she had been scanning for rare plants. Something —perhaps a dog, or a trail bike—had gouged a large messy hole in the peat; and inside the hole, just visible above dark water, what looked like a hand and part of an arm had been exposed. The arm appeared to be covered with long hair.

Frank stepped back hastily, yanking his Wellington boot out of the muck with a rude noise. "One of us had better go after the police."

"No," said Jenny, still panting. "*We've* got to dig him out. Never mind why, just help me do it." Already she was pulling her anorak over her head and rolling up her sleeves.

There were no flies on Frank Flintoft. After one hard look at his wife he began unbuttoning his own jacket.

Apart from a few sheep scattered across the long slopes of moor there was no one to see them delving in the bog. In twenty minutes, using a pocketknife, a plastic trowel, and their bare hands, they had exposed a small body. The body had been laid on its back in a shallow grave, not shrouded or even clothed except in the long, shaggy hair, stained a dark brown by the peaty water, that covered him completely.

While they labored to clear the face, scooping up double handfuls of mucky peat and throwing them out of the hole, Jenny abruptly began to cry silently; and when the body lay wholly uncovered, and they had

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poured a canteen of water over it to wash it a little cleaner, Frank stood and gazed soberly, then put his arm around Jenny and said gently, "Elphi, I presume."

Jenny took no notice of the tears that continued to streak her filthy face, except to wipe her nose on her sleeve. "No, it's another hob, called Woof Howe." And there at the graveside she began to tell Frank the story which had fallen upon her, entire and clear in every detail, as soon as their digging had revealed the corpse's form. "I'm pretty sure he meant to bury Woof Howe in the bog over there, on the grounds of the EWS," she finished. "The fence must have been too much for him—imagine trying to get in there carrying a body, all by yourself, no matter *how* strong you were." The moor wind blew upon them, stirring the reeds around the grave; Jenny shivered and leaned against Frank.

"Or I suppose this could be one of the other hobs, that died later on—Elphi himself, possibly."

"Un-uh, not Elphi," said Jenny. She spoke in a dazed way, obviously somewhat in shock, and Frank gave her a concerned look. "I really thought the acid in the peat would decompose soft tissue fast—that's what I told him, I'd actually read it somewhere—but I hadn't heard then about the bog people of Ireland and Denmark, that were preserved for thousands of years in peat bogs."

"Ah. And so the result was just the opposite of what you intended."

"It looks that way, doesn't it." She stared down at the dead face. "I'm glad and sorry both."

"But mostly glad?"

"I guess so."

"Well," said Frank, "what shall we do about it then? Notify the police after all, or the Moors Centre?"

"No." Jenny roused herself and stood on her own feet. "We'll just bury him again, and try to make it look like this spot had never been touched."

Frank started, but swallowed his objections. "Sure that's what you want?"

Jenny stated flatly, "Elphi wouldn't trust me to keep his secret. I'm going to prove he was wrong. We'll just cover Woof Howe up again, and smooth out the mud, and leave him in peace."

"It's been over fifteen years, love," Frank could not help protesting. "The other hobs could all be dead by now."

"I know, but what if they're not?"

Sighing, Frank gave in. "But we'll take his picture first at least, all right? *I'd quite like to have one.*"

"Okay, I guess that can't do any harm." So, having wiped the mud off his hands as best he could, Frank snapped several pictures with Jenny's camera, with its close-up lens for photographing wildflowers, before be-

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ginning to push the peat back into the hole containing the perfectly preserved body of Woof Howe Hob.

In a fortnight's time the reeds had reestablished themselves upon the grave; in another month nobody could have said for certain just where the bog at May Moss had been disturbed. No one's curiosity was aroused and no inquiries were made; and that would have been the end of the matter, except for this:

About the time the sedge was growing tall again above Woof Howe, Frank stood in the kitchen door and called to Jenny, "What in the name of sanity possessed you to try mucking out the chicken coop all on your own?" He sounded quite cross, for him.

Jenny came into the kitchen carrying a book. "Is this a clever way of shaming me into action? You know I've had the bloody chicken coop on my conscience for weeks, but if anybody's been mucking it out it wasn't me."

"Come and see." Frank led her through the gathering dusk, across the barnyard. There stood the coop, its floor scraped down to the wood and spread with clean straw. The hens clucked about contentedly in their yard. The manure-filled rubbish had been raked into a tidy heap for composting. Jenny stared flabbergasted.

"Do you actually mean to say," said Frank, "that this isn't your doing?"

"It ought to be, but it's not."

They walked slowly back toward the house, arms about each other, trying to puzzle it out.

"Maybe Billy Davies dropped by after school, thinking to earn a few pounds and surprise us," Frank suggested. "I've paid him to muck out the pigs, and the barn, and he knows about composting . . . but it doesn't seem his style somehow."

"I guess it could have been John, or Peter," Jenny said doubtfully. "Though why either of them would take it upon himself . . . and the only person I've actually *spoken* to about wanting to get around to the job is you. Did you mention it to anybody?"

The thought struck each of them at the same instant.

"Waaaaaaait a minute—" said Frank, and "Good God, you don't think—" said Jenny; and both were speechless, staring at one another.

Frank found his voice first. "Now, if they're *not* all dead—"

Jenny interrupted: "Frank! What if one of the sheep on the commons, that day at May Moss—wasn't a sheep!"

His eyes opened wide. "Wasn't a sheep? You mean—and followed us here somehow, found out who you were, and where we lived?"

"Is that possible? Could they do it? What if they could!"

"*You* said it wasn't him in the grave, you were sure of it."

"I still am. It wasn't him."

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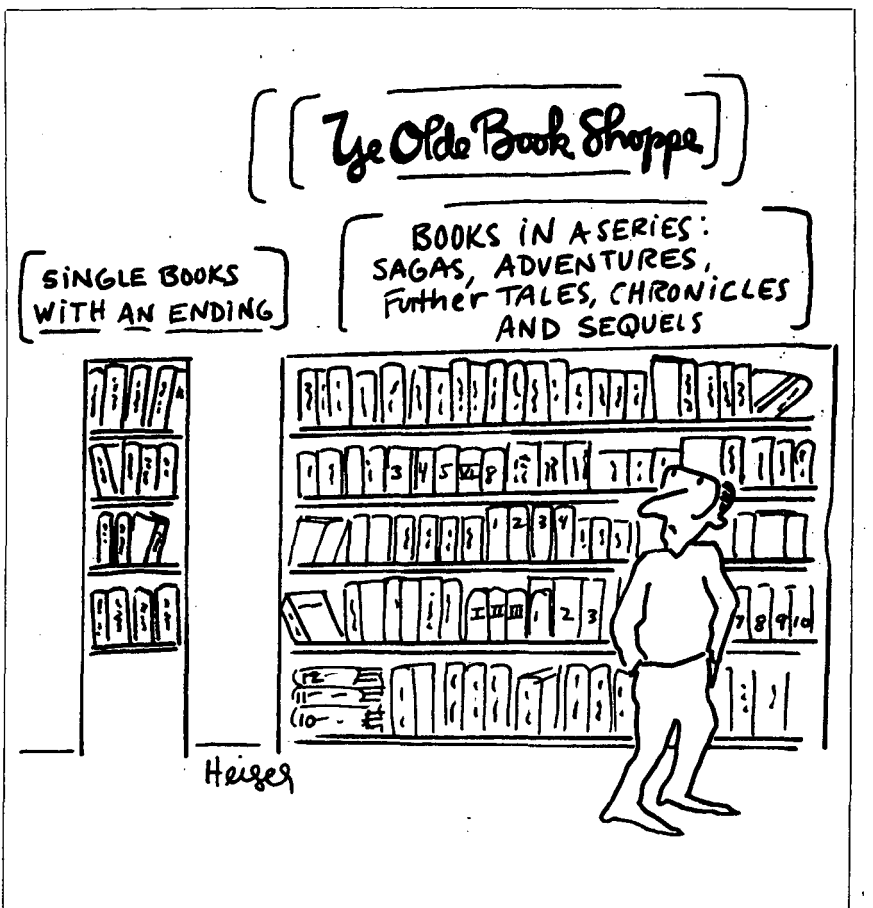
"Well then, who else would muck out a chicken coop without being asked, tell me that!"

By now they were laughing and clutching at each other, almost dancing. Abruptly Jenny broke free and ran up the kitchen steps. She snatched a stoneware jug down from a shelf, filled it to the brim with cream from the crock in the fridge, and set the jug on the top step, careful not to spill a drop. ●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FLIGHT OF FANCY

by Isaac Asimov

art: Hank Jankus

Even the most nonreligious person may find there are certain concepts which he accepts on faith alone . . .

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When I dine with George, I am careful not to use a credit card in payment. I pay cash, since that gives George the chance of exercising his amiable habit of scooping up the change. Naturally, I am careful to see to it that the change brought back is not excessive, and I leave a tip separately.

We had had lunch, on this occasion, at the Boathouse and were walking back through the park. It was a beautiful day and just a bit on the warm side so we sat down on a bench in the shade and relaxed.

George watched a bird, seated on a branch in the twitching way birds have, and then followed it with his eyes as it flew away.

He said, "When I was a boy I was outraged that those things could go darting through the air, and I couldn't."

I said, "I suppose every child envies the birds. And grown-ups, too. Yet human beings *can* fly, and they can do so faster and farther than a bird ever could. Look at the plane that circumnavigated the Earth in nine days, non-stop, and without refueling. No bird could do that."

"What bird would want to," said George, with contempt. "I'm not talking about sitting in a machine that flies, or even dangling from a hang-glider. Those are technological compromises. I mean, being in control; flapping your arms gently, then rising and moving at will."

I sighed. "You mean being free of gravity. I once dreamed that, George. I once dreamed that I could jump in the air and stay there by the gentlest maneuvering of my arms, and then come down slowly and lightly. Of course, I knew that was impossible, so I assumed I was dreaming. But then—in my dream—I seemed to wake up and find myself in bed. I got out of bed and found I could *still* maneuver freely in the air. And now, because it seemed to me I had awakened, I believed I could really do it. And then I *really* woke up and found I was as much a prisoner of gravity as ever. What a feeling of loss I had, what a keen sense of disappointment. I didn't recover for days."

And, almost inevitably, George said, "I've known worse."

"Is that so? You had a similar dream, did you? Only bigger and better?"

"Dreams! I don't traffic with dreams. I leave that to dabbling scriveners like yourself. I'm talking about reality."

"You mean you were really flying. Am I supposed to believe you were in a spaceship in orbit?"

"Not in a spaceship. Right here on Earth. And not me. It was my friend, Baldur Anderson—but I suppose I had better tell you the story—"

Most of my friends [said George] are intellectuals and professional men, as perhaps you might consider yourself to be, but Baldur was not. He was a taxi-driver, without much education, but with a profound respect for science. Many an evening we spent in our favorite pub, drinking

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beer and talking about the big bang and the laws of thermodynamics and genetic engineering and so on. He was always very grateful to me for explaining these arcane matters to him and insisted, over my protests, as you may well believe, on picking up the tabs.

There was only one unpleasant aspect of his personality; he was an unbeliever. I don't mean your philosophical unbeliever who happens to reject any aspect of the supernatural, who joins some secular humanist organization, and who carefully expresses himself in language that no one understands by way of articles published in magazines that no one reads. What harm is there in that?

I mean that Baldur was what in the old days would have been termed the village atheist. He would pick arguments in the pub with people as ignorant of such matters as he was and they would go at it with loud and scurrilous language. It was not an exercise in rarefied reasoning. The typical argument would go as follows:

"Well, if you're so smart, onion-head," Baldur would say, "tell me where Cain got his wife?"

"None of your business," his adversary would say.

"Because Eve was the only woman alive at the time according to the Bible," he would say.

"How do you know?"

"The Bible says so."

"It does not. Show me where it says, 'At this time, Eve was the only dame on the whole Earth.' "

"That's implied."

"Implied, my foot."

"Oh, yeah?"

"Yeah!"

I would reason with Baldur, during some quiet moments. "Baldur," I would say, "there's no reason to argue matters of faith. It won't settle anything, and it just creates unpleasantness."

Baldur would say, belligerently, "It's my constitutional right not to go for the phony baloney stuff and to say so."

"Of course," I said, "but one of these days, one of those gentlemen who are consuming alcoholic beverages here might hit you before he stops to remember the constitution."

"Those guys," said Baldur, "are supposed to turn the other cheek. It says so in the Bible. It says, 'Don't make a fuss about evil. Leave it be!' "

"They could forget."

"So what if they do. I can handle myself." And indeed he could, for he was a large and muscular man with a nose that looked as though it had stopped many a punch and fists that looked as though they had exacted exemplary vengeance for such acts.

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"I'm sure you can," I said, "but in arguments over religion, there are usually several persons in opposition and only one of you. A dozen people acting in concert might well reduce you to something approaching a pulp. Besides," I added, "suppose you do win an argument over some religious point. You might then cause one of these gentlemen here to lose his faith. Do you really feel you should be responsible for such a loss?"

Baldur looked troubled, for he was a kindly man at heart. He said, "I never make any remarks about real tender parts of religion. I talk about Cain and about Jonah not being able to live three days in any whale and about walking on water. I don't say anything *really* lousy. I don't ever say anything against Santa Claus, do I?—Listen, I once heard a guy say right out loud that Santa Claus had only eight reindeer and that there was no Rudolph the red-nosed reindeer ever pulling that sleigh. I said, 'Are you trying to make little kids unhappy?' and I popped him one. And I don't let anyone say anything against Frosty the Snowman, either."

Such sensitivity touched me, of course. I said to him, "How did you ever get to this state, Baldur? What turned you into such a rabid unbeliever?"

"Angels," he said, frowning darkly.

"Angels?"

"Yeah. When I was a kid, I saw pictures of angels. You ever see pictures of angels?"

"Of course."

"They got wings. They got arms and they got legs and on their backs they got big wings. I used to read books on science when I was a kid and those books said that every animal that had a backbone had four limbs. They got four flippers, or four legs, or two legs and two arms, or two legs and two wings. Sometimes they could lose the two hind legs, like whales did, or two front legs like kiwis did, or all four legs like snakes did. But none of them could have more than four. So how come angels have six limbs, two legs, two arms, and two wings. They got backbones, ain't they? They ain't insects, or something. I asked my mother how come and she said to shut up. So then I thought of lots of things like that."

I said, "Actually, Baldur, you can't take those representations of angels literally. Those wings are symbolic. They simply indicate the speed with which angels can move from place to place."

"Oh, yeah?" said Baldur. "You ask those Bible-guys anytime if angels got wings. *They* believe angels got wings. They're too dumb to understand about six limbs. The whole thing is dumb. Besides, it bothers me about angels. They're supposed to fly, so how come *I* can't fly? That ain't right." His lower lip thrust out and he seemed to be on the point of tears. My soft heart melted and I looked for some way to console him.

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"If it comes to that, Baldur," I said, "when you die and go to heaven, you'll get wings along with a halo and a harp and then you'll be able to fly, too."

"You believe that junk, George?"

"Well, not exactly, but it would be comforting to believe it. Why don't you try?"

"I'm not going to, because it ain't scientific. All my life I've wanted to fly—personally—just me and my arms. I figure there must be some scientific way to fly by myself, right here on Earth."

I still wanted to console him so I said, incautiously, having had, perhaps, half a drink above my abstemious limit, "I'm sure there is a way."

He fixed me with a censorious and slightly bloodshot eye. "Are you kidding me?" he said. "Are you making fun of an honest childhood desire?"

"No, no," I said, and it suddenly occurred to me that he had had perhaps a dozen drinks too many and that his right fist was twitching in a most unpleasant way. "Would I make fun of an honest childhood desire? Or even of an adult obsession? I just happen to know a—a scientist who might know of a way."

He still seemed belligerent to me. "You ask him," he said, "and let me know what he says. I don't like people who make fun of me. It ain't kind. I don't make fun of you, do I? I don't mention that you never pick up a tab, do I?"

That was treading on dangerous ground. I said, hurriedly, "I'm going to consult my friend. Don't worry. I'll fix everything up."

On the whole, I thought I had better do so. I did not want to cut off my supply of free drinks and I wanted even less to be the object of Baldur's resentment. He did not believe in the Biblical admonitions that he love his enemies and bless them that curse him and do good to them that hate him. Baldur believed in popping them in the eye.

So I consulted my extraterrestrial friend, Azazel. Have I ever told you that I have—I have?—Well, I consulted him.

Azazel was, as usual, in a terrible temper when I brought him in. He held his tail at an unusual angle and when I inquired about it, he broke into a frenzy of very shrill commentary on my ancestry—matters concerning which he could not possibly have known anything.

I gathered he had been accidentally stepped on. He is a very small being, about two centimeters tall, although his tail adds another two, and even on his own world, I suspect that he can only succeed in being underfoot. He was certainly under someone's foot on this occasion and the humiliation of having been too small to be noted had reduced him to frenzy.

I said, soothingly, "If you had the ability to fly, O Mighty One to Whom

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all the Universe pays Homage, you would not be subject to the clodhoppers of clodhoppers."

That rather cheered him up. He kept muttering the final phrase to himself, as though he were memorizing it for future use. Then he said, "I *can* fly, O Ugly Mass of Worthless Flesh, and I would have flown if I had taken the trouble to note the presence of the lower-class individual who, in his clumsiness, fell up against me.—In any case, what is it you want?" He rather snarled as he asked this, though the high pitch of his tiny voice made it sound more like a buzz.

Smoothly, I said, "Although you can fly, Exalted One, there are people on my world who cannot."

"There are *no* people on your world who can. They are as gross, as swollen, as clumsy as so many shalidraconiconia. If you knew anything about aerodynamics, Miserable Insect, you would know—"

"I bow to your superior knowledge, Wisest of the Wise, but it had crossed my mind that you might manage a small amount of antigravity."

"Antigravity? Do you know how—"

"Colossal Mind," I said, "may I have leave to remind you that you have done this before?"*

"That, as I recall, was only a partial treatment," said Azazel. "It was barely enough to allow a person to move along the tops of the heaps of frozen water you have on your horrid world. You are now asking, I take it, for something more extreme."

"Yes, I have a friend who would like to fly."

"You have peculiar friends." He sat down on his tail as he frequently did when he wished to think, and, of course, jumped up with a thin shriek of agony, having forgotten the contused state of his caudal extremity.

I blew on his tail, which seemed to help and to mollify him. He said, "It will take a mechanical antigravity device, which, of course, I can get for you, together with the complete cooperation of your friend's autonomic nervous system, assuming he has one."

"I believe he has one," I said, "but how may he achieve the cooperation?"

Azazel hesitated. "I suppose that what it amounts to is that he must *believe* he can fly."

I visited Baldur two days later in his unassuming apartment. I held out the device to him and said, "Here."

It was not an imposign device. It was the size and shape of a walnut and if one put it to one's ear, one could hear a very faint buzz. What the power source was I could not say, but Azazel assured me it would not run down.

*See "Dashing Through the Snow", *IAsfm*, Mid-December 1984.

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He also said it had to be in contact with the skin of the flier, so I had put it on a small chain and made a locket of it. "Here," I said again, as Baldur shied away from it suspiciously. "Put the chain around your neck and wear it under your shirt.—Under your undershirt, too, if you have one."

He said, "What is it, George?"

"It's an antigravity device, Baldur. The latest thing. Very scientific, and very secret. You must never tell anyone about it."

He reached out for it. "Are you sure? Did your friend give you this?"

I nodded. "Put it on."

Hesitatingly, he slipped it over his head and, with a little encouragement from me, he opened his shirt, let it fall down behind his undershirt and then buttoned up again. "Now what?" he said.

"Now flap your arms and you'll fly."

He flapped his arms and nothing happened. His eyebrows hunched in lowering fashion over his small eyes. "Are you making fun of me?"

"*No.* You've got to *believe* you're going to fly. Did you ever see Walt Disney's *Peter Pan?* Tell yourself, 'I can fly, I can fly, I can fly.' "

"They had some kind of dust they sprinkled."

"That's not scientific. What you're wearing is scientific. Tell yourself you can fly."

Baldur favored me with a long, hard stare, and I must tell you that although I am as brave as a lion, I felt a bit anxious. I said, "It takes a little time, Baldur. You've got to learn how."

He was still glaring at me, but he flapped his arms vigorously and said, "I can fly. I can fly. I can fly." Nothing happened.

"Jump!" I said, "Give it a little headstart." I wondered nervously if Azazel had known what he was doing this time.

Baldur, still glaring and still flapping, jumped. Up he went in the air about a foot, remained there while I counted three and then slowly descended.

"Hey," he said eloquently.

"Hey," I responded, in considerable surprise.

"I sort of floated there."

"And very gracefully," I said.

"Yeah. Hey, I *can* fly. Let's try again."

He did, and his hair left a distinct greasy spot where he hit the ceiling. He came down rubbing it.

I said, "You can only go up about four feet, you know."

"In here, I can. Let's get outside."

"Are you crazy? You don't want people to know you can fly. They'll take that antigravity thing away from you so scientists can study it, and

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you'll never be able to fly again. My friend is the only one who knows about it now and it's secret."

"Well, what am I going to do?"

"Enjoy yourself flying around in the room."

"That's not much."

"Not much? How much could you fly five minutes ago?"

My powerful logic was, as usual, convincing.

I must admit that as I watched him move about freely and gracefully within the rather unfragrant air of the limited confines of his not very large living room, I had a distinct urge to try it myself. I was not sure he would give up his antigravity device, however, and, what was more, I had a strong suspicion it would not work for me.

Azazel consistently refuses to do anything for me directly, on what he calls ethical grounds. His gifts, he says in his idiotic fashion, are meant only to benefit others. I wish he didn't feel that way, or that others did. I have never been able to persuade the beneficiaries of my beneficence to enrich me noticeably.

Baldur finally came down upon one of his chairs and said, complacently, "You mean I can do this because I believe."

"That's right," I said, "It's a flight of fancy."

I rather liked the phrase but Baldur is wit-deaf, if I may invent a term. He said, "See, George, it's much better to believe in science than in heaven and all that junk about angel-wings."

"Absolutely," I said. "Shall we stop off for dinner and then have a few drinks?"

"You bet," he said—and we had an excellent evening.

And yet, somehow, things did not go well. A settled melancholy seemed to cast its pall over Baldur. He abandoned his ancient haunts and found new watering-holes.

I didn't mind. The new places were a cut above the old ones and usually produced excellent dry martinis. But I was curious and asked.

"I can't argue with those dumb-heads no more," said Baldur glumly. "I get the craving to tell them I can fly like an angel so are they going to worship me? And would they believe me? They believe all that crud about talking snakes and dames turning into salt—fairy tales, just fairy tales. But they wouldn't believe *me*. Not on your life. So I just got to stay away from them. Even the Bible says: Hang not out in the company of jerks, nor sit in the seat of the scornful."

And, periodically, he would burst out and say, "I can't just do it in my apartment. There's no *room*. I don't get the *feel*. I got to do it in the open air. I got to climb into the sky and go swooping around."

"You will be seen."

"I can do it at night."

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"Then you'll crash into a hillside and be killed."

"Not if I go up real high."

"Then what'll you see at night? You might as well fly around in your room."

He said, "I'll find a place where there are no people."

"These days," I said, "*where* are there no people?"

My powerful logic always won the day, but he got more and more unhappy and finally, I didn't see him for several days. He wasn't at home. The taxi-garage out of which he worked said he had taken a two-week vacation that was coming to him, and no, they didn't know where he was. It wasn't that I minded missing out on his hospitality—at least I didn't mind much—but I was worried what he might be doing on his own with all this madness about swooping through the air.

I found out eventually, when he returned to his apartment and telephoned me. I scarcely recognized his broken voice, and of course, I came to him at once when he explained that he needed me badly.

He sat in his room, dispirited and heartsick. "George," he said, "I never should've done it."

"Done what, Baldur?"

It poured out of him. "You remember I said I wanted to find a place where there was no people."

"I remember."

"So I got an idea. I took some time off when the weather forecast said there would be a bunch of bright, sunny days, and I went and hired a plane. I went down to one of those airports where you can get a ride if you pay for it—like a taxi, only you fly."

"I know. I know," I said.

"I tell the guy to head out to the suburbs and fly around all the hick places. I said I wanted to look at the scenery. What I was gonna do was look around for some real empty places, and when I found one I'd ask what it was and then some weekend I'd come out there and fly like I really wanted to fly all my life."

"Baldur," I said, "You can't tell from up in the sky. A place may look empty from up there, but be full of people."

And he said, bitterly, "What's the use of telling me that *now*." He paused, shook his head, then went on. "It was one of those real old-fashioned planes. Open cockpit in front and open passenger seat in back, and I'm leaning way out so I can watch the ground and make sure there are no highways, no automobiles, no farmhouses. I take off my seat-belt so I can watch better—I mean, I can fly, so I'm not scared of being high in the air. Only I'm leaning way out and the pilot don't know I'm doing that and he makes a turn and the airplane sort of leans in the direction

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I'm looking out, and before I can catch hold of something, I fall right out."

"Good heavens," I said.

Baldur had a can of beer at his side and he paused to gulp at it thirstily. He wiped his mouth with the back of his hand and he said, "George, did you ever fall out of an airplane without a parachute?"

"No," I said, "Now that I think of it, I don't think I have ever done that."

"Well, try it some day," said Baldur, "it's a funny feeling. I was caught all by surprise. For a while I couldn't figure out what happened. It was just open air everywhere and the ground was sort of turning around and then moving up and going over my head and around and I kept saying to myself, What the heck's going *on*. Then, after a while I can feel a wind and it's blowing stronger and stronger, only I can't tell exactly from what direction. And then it sort of percolates in my head that I'm falling. I just says to myself, Hey, I'm falling. And as soon as I say that, I can see I am, and the ground looks like it's below and I'm going down fast and I know I'm going to hit and covering up my eyes isn't going to do me any good.

"Would you believe, George, all that time I never thought I could fly. I was too surprised. I could've been *killed*. But now when I'm almost down there, I remember, and I say to myself: I can fly! I can fly! It was like skidding in the air. It was like the air turning to a big rubberband that's attached to me on top and is pulling back so that I slow down and slow down. And when I'm about tree-top high I'm going real slow and I'm thinking: Maybe now is the time to swoop. But I feel sort of worn out and there's just a tiny way to go so I straighten out, slow down some more, and land on my feet with the tiniest, tiniest bump.

"And, of course, you're right, George. Everything looked empty when I was way up there, but when I got down to the ground there was a whole crowd of people gathered around me and there was a kind of church with a steeple nearby—which I guess I didn't make out from way up, what with the trees and all."

Baldur closed his eyes and, for a while, he contented himself with breathing heavily.

"What happened, Baldur?" I asked, finally.

"You'll never guess," he said.

"I don't want to guess," I said. "Just tell me."

He opened his eyes, and said, "They'd all come out of the church, some real Bible-believing church, and one of them falls to his knees, and lifts up his hands and yells, 'A miracle! A miracle!' and all the rest do the same. You never heard such a noise. And one guy comes up, a short, fat guy, and says 'I'm a doctor. Tell me what happened.' I can't think what

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to tell him. I mean how do you explain how come you're shooting down from the sky. They're gonna holler I'm an angel soon. So I tell the truth. I say, 'I accidentally fell out of an airplane.' And they all start hollering, 'A miracle' again.

"The doctor says, 'Did you have a parachute?' How'm I going to say I had a parachute when there ain't none around me so I say, 'No.' And he said, 'You were seen falling and then slowing up and landing gently.' And then another guy—it turned out he was the preacher of the church—said, in a kind of deep voice, 'It was the hand of God upholding him.'

"Well, I can't take that, so I said, 'It was *not*. It was an anti-gravity thing I got.' And the doctor says to me, 'A what?' I said 'An anti-gravity thing.' And he laughs and says, 'I'd go for the hand of God, if I were you,' like I'm coming up with a gag.

"By that time, the pilot has landed his airplane and come up and he's white as a sheet, saying, 'It wasn't my fault. The damn fool unbuckled his safety belt,' and he sees me standing there and he damn near faints. He said, 'How did you get here? You didn't have no parachute.' And everyone starts singing some kind of psalm or other and the preacher takes the pilot's hand and tells him it's the hand of God and I've been saved because I'm meant to do some great work in the world and how everyone in his congregation who was here this day were now surer than ever that God was on his throne and working away like anything to do his good work, and all sorts of stuff like that.

"He even got *me* to thinking about it; I mean, that I was being saved for something great. Then newspaper people came and some more doctors—I don't know who called them—and I was asked questions till I thought I would go crazy, but the doctors stopped them and carried me off to a hospital for an examination."

I was stupefied at this. "They actually put you in a hospital."

"Never left me alone for a minute. The local paper had me in headlines and some scientist came over from Rutgers or somewhere and he kept asking me about it. I said I had this antigravity and he laughed. I said, 'Do you think it was a miracle, then? You? A scientist?' And he said, 'There are lots of scientists who believe in God, but not one scientist who believes antigravity is possible.' Then he said, 'But show me how it works, Mr. Anderson, and I may change my mind.' And, of course, I couldn't make it work, and I still can't."

To my horror, Baldur covered his face with his hands and began to weep.

I said, "Pull yourself together, Baldur. It *must* work."

He shook his head and said, in muffled tones. "No, it don't. It only works if I believe and I don't believe no more. Everyone says it's a miracle.

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No one believes in antigravity. They just laugh at me and the scientist said the thing was just a piece of metal with no power source and no controls and antigravity was impossible according to Einstein, the relativity guy. George, I should've done like you said. Now I'll never fly again, because I lost my faith. Maybe it wasn't never antigravity and it was all God, working through you for some reason. —I'm beginning to believe in God, and I've lost my faith."

Poor fellow. He never did fly again. He gave me back the device, which I returned to Azazel.

Eventually, Baldur quit his job, went back to that church near which he came down, and he now works as a deacon there. They take care of him very kindly because they think the hand of God was upon him.

I looked at George intently, but his face, as always when he tells me of Azazel, bore a look of simple candor.

I said, "George, did this happen recently?"

"Just last year."

"With all this fuss about a miracle, and newspapermen, and headlines in the papers and the rest?"

"That's right."

"Well, then, can you explain how it is that I've never seen anything about it in the papers?"

George reached into his pocket and extracted the five dollars and eighty-two cents that represented the change he had carefully collected after I had paid for lunch with a twenty and a ten. He isolated the bill and said, "Five dollars says I can explain that."

I didn't hesitate a moment, and said, "Five dollars says you can't."

He said, "You only read the New York *Times*, right?"

"Right," I said.

"And the New York *Times* with due regard to what it considers its intellectual readership places all reports of miracles on page 31 in some obscure place near the advertisements for bikini bathing suits, right?"

"Possibly, but what makes you think I wouldn't see it even in a small obscure news-item?"

"Because," said George, triumphantly, "it is well known that except for some scare headlines, you see nothing in the newspaper. You go through the New York *Times* looking only to see if your name is mentioned anywhere."

I thought a while, then let him have the other five dollars. What he said wasn't true, but I know it's probably the general opinion, so I decided there was no use arguing. ●

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THE SIZING OF CURSES

Small curses are the swiftest.
Anonymous and hard to track
as rats within the walls.
Invisible until they bite
and maim the child in its crib,
then fade like bloody smoke.

Middling curses are more perilous,
more apt to betray their maker.
One fey move and the shadows
can turn like dogs upon a master.
Yet fiercer they are than dogs
and faster to the throat.

Master curses are for the adept.
You must learn the arcane writ
by heart and renounce all thought
at the level of dark illumination.
You may then slay your enemies abed
and scorch their lands with light.

Curses all are cursed again.
The ones they are wrought upon
bear the edge of their harsh magic.
For ones who forge such flinty spells,
the weight of their casting
hangs and hangs within the head.

—Bruce Boston

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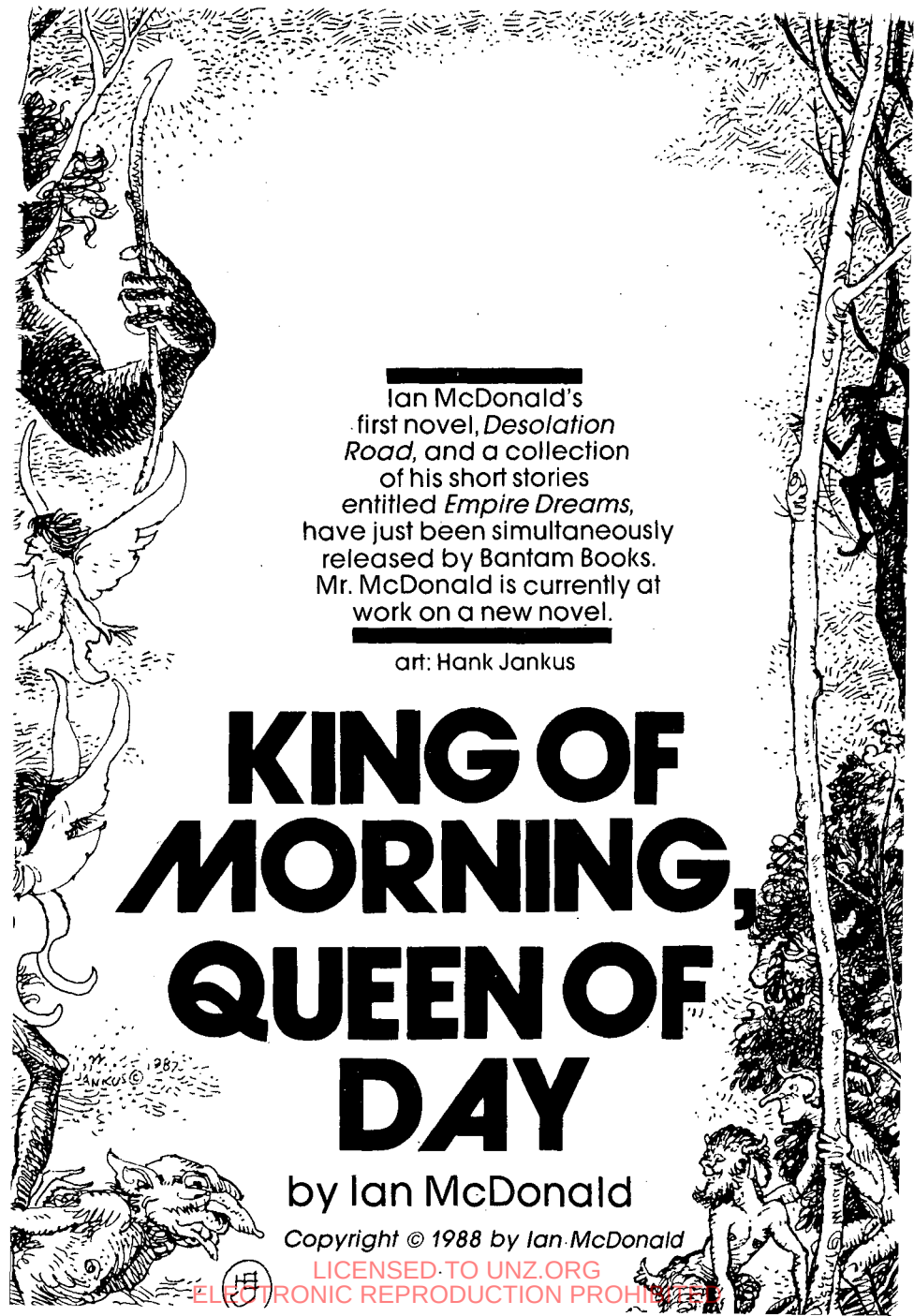

Ian McDonald's first novel, *Desolation Road*, and a collection of his short stories entitled *Empire Dreams*, have just been simultaneously released by Bantam Books. Mr. McDonald is currently at work on a new novel.

art: Hank Jankus

KING OF MORNING, QUEEN OF DAY

by Ian McDonald

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Dr. Edward Garret Desmond's personal diary: 12th April 1909

Last night, upon the occasion of my daughter Emily's sixteenth birthday, I took the liberty of drawing Lord Fitzgerald, a keen amateur astronomer and fellow of the Society, aside from the celebrations (such girlish things doubtless holding little appeal for the Marquis of Claremorris) and showed him through my eighteen-inch reflector the object referred to by my philistine colleagues in the Royal Irish Astronomical Society as "Bell's Comet." Lord Fitzgerald I know to be a highly educated and intelligent man (a rare commodity in these days of inbred gentry and fossilized aristocracy) and a close friend who would receive openly and without prejudice my speculations upon the nature of "Bell's Comet."

While at the telescope the marquis observed one of the object's periodic flarings (which I have calculated to occur every twenty-eight minutes) when, for a second or so, "Bell's Comet" becomes as bright as a major planet. Lord Fitzgerald expressed a great and open curiosity in the phenomenon, and as he had previously intimated to me that he would be unable to attend the meeting of the Society which I am to address four days hence (due to commitments in that great cauldron of muddy thought and confusion, the House of Lords in London), I explained my hypotheses briefly to Lord Fitzgerald, partly as preparation for my lecture to my peers, partly, I must confess, to win a favorable ear. Here I must confess further that it is more than the Marquis of Claremorris's ear I mean to win; I have need of his considerable fortune if "Project Pharos" is to be brought to fruition.

On a personal note, how good it was to have Emily about the house again! She is like a beam of spring sunshine, flitting through the house like a faerie brightening whatever she touches. Why, I had not realized what a dark and gloomy place Craigdarragh is without her until she arrived from Dublin and the Cross and Passion School this morning. I rather fear that I have grown engrossed in my work to the exclusion of all else, even my dearest daughter!

Domestic memo: I must remind Mrs. O'Carolan to have a man up from the town to look at the electricals: last night's current failure caused great distress to the young ladies at the party. Voltage fluctuations apart, the birthday tea was most successful; Emily was clearly delighted. Young girls are so easily pleased!

Emily's Diary: 13th April 1909

How wonderful it is to be home again! All the dreary hours I spent in Sister Immaculata's Latin 5th dreaming of home have not dulled Craig-

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darragh's wonderfulness: for three days I have gone round hugging every wall, window and door in the place! I almost hugged Mrs. O'Carolan when she met me off the train in Sligo town; oh, the look there would have been on her face, God bless her! How good it is to see people who are round and plump and happy after the pinched black and white nuns. They are like magpies, the nuns, always miserable, always cackling and rubbing their black wings together. I hate them and I hate Cross and Passion, it is like a prison, old and grey, and it is always raining.

I had forgotten the colors of Craigdarragh in the spring, the new greens of the hills and the woods, the blue of the sea and beyond it purple Knocknarea, the red of the early rhododendrons, my father's red cheeks and beard: it is funny how easily you forget the colors when there is only grey around you. But oh, nothing has changed, and that is so good; everything is as it was when I left after Christmas. Mrs. O'Carolan is fat and fusty and kind, Mama is Mama, pretending she is an artist and a poet and a tragic queen from a legend all rolled into one; Papa is Papa, worried and hurried and so busy with his telescopes and sums I'm sure he's already forgotten I'm here. And Craigdarragh is Craigdarragh: the woods, the mountain, the waterfall. Today I revisited the Bridestone up above the woods on the slopes of Ben Bulben. How peaceful it is there with only the wind and the song of the blackbird for company. Peaceful, and, dare I say, magical? It is like nothing has changed for a thousand years. One can imagine Finn MacCool and his grim Fianna warriors hunting the leaping stag with red-eared hounds through some woodland glade, or the sunlight glinting from the spear-points of the Red Branch Heroes as they march to avenge a slaughtered comrade.

Perhaps my imagination is too vigorous after months of confinement in that grey prison of Cross and Passion: I could have sworn that I was not alone as I came down through the woods from the Bridestone, that there were shadowy shapes flitting from tree to tree, unseen when I looked for them, giggling at my foolishness. Ah well, I did say it was an enchanted, faerie place.

Excerpts from Dr. Edward Garret Desmond's Lecture to the Royal Irish Astronomical Society: Trinity College, Dublin, 16th April 1909

"Therefore, learned gentlemen, it is clearly impossible for these fluctuations in luminosity from Bell's Comet to be due to the differing albedos of its spinning surfaces as my mathematical proofs have demonstrated. The only explanation for this unprecedented phenomenon is that these emissions of light are artificial in origin."

General consternation among the learned fellows.

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"If artificial, then we must address ourselves to the disturbing truth that they must, *must,* gentlemen, be works of intellects: minds, learned fellows, as great as, if not greater than, our own. It has long been held that we are not the unique handiwork of our Creator; the possibility of great civilizations upon the planets Mars and Venus and even beneath the forbidding surface of our own moon has been mooted many times by respected men of science and learning."

Heckler: "Intoxicated men of absinthe and brandy!" Laughter.

"What I am now proposing, if I may, gentlemen, is a concept of a whole order of magnitude greater than these speculations. I am proposing that this artifact, for artificial it must be, is evidence of a mighty civilization *beyond our solar system,* upon a world of the star Wolfe 359, for it is from the direction of this star that the object called Bell's Comet originates. Having ascertained that the object was indeed no mere lifeless comet, I attempted to ascertain its velocity. As the learned fellows are doubtless too aware, it is difficult in the extreme to calculate the velocity of astronomical phenomena; nevertheless, I calculated the object's velocity to be three hundred and fifty miles per second."

Murmurs of amazement from the learned fellows.

"However, over the four-week period during which I kept the object under daily observation, weather permitting, this velocity decreased from three hundred and fifty miles per second to one hundred and twenty miles per second. Clearly, the object is decelerating, and from this information only one conclusion is possible, that the object is a spatial vehicle of some form, dispatched by the inhabitants of Wolfe 359 to establish contact with the inhabitants of our earth."

Heckler: "Oh come now."

"While the exact design of such a spatial vehicle is beyond my conception, I have some tentative suggestions as to its motive power. Our French colleague has written most imaginatively *(Heckler: "Not as imaginatively as you, sir")* of how a great space-gun might propel a capsule around the moon. Intriguing though this notion is, it is quite impractical for a journey from Wolfe 359 to our earth. The velocity imparted by such a space-gun would not be sufficient for the journey to be completed within the lifetimes of its voyagers. *(Heckler: "Will this lecture be completed within the lifetimes of its audience?" Laughter.)*

"Therefore I suggest, if I may do so without interruption, learned fellows, that the vehicle accelerates and decelerates through a series of self-generated explosions, of titanic force, which propel the vehicle through transstellar space at colossal velocities. Of course, such star-crossing velocities must be shed to rendezvous with our earth at the completion of the journey, and I would submit that the immense flarings of light we

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are witnessing are the explosions by which the vehicle slows its headlong flight.

(Heckler: "Are we with any seriousness meant to accept these fanciful vaporings over the Astronomer Royal's reasoned arguments?")

"Gentlemen, I cannot say with any measure of scientific certainty *(Catcalls, booing. Heckler: "What scientific certainty?")* what such a propulsive explosive might be. Certainly no earthly explosive would possess sufficient power for its weight to be a practical fuel for such a transstellar flight. *(Heckler: "Oh certainly!" Laughter.)* However, I have conducted a spectral analysis of the light from Bell's Comet and found it to be identical to the light of our own familiar sun. *(Heckler: "Of course, it's reflected sunlight!" Laughter.)* Could it be that the extrasolar stellanauts of Wolfe 359 have learned to duplicate artificially the force that kindles the sun itself and tamed it to power their space vehicles? *(Heckler: "Could it be that the Member from Drumcliffe has learned to duplicate artificially the spirit of the mountain dew and used it to fuel his somewhat active imagination?" Uproarious laughter.)*

"Learned fellows . . . gentlemen, please, if I might have your attention; since it is now clear that we are not unique in God's universe, it is therefore of paramount importance, even urgency, that we communicate with these representatives of intelligence immeasurably superior to our own.

Therefore, in August of this year, when Bell's Comet makes its closest approach to earth *(Heckler: "I don't believe it! Gentlemen, a fact! A cold, hard fact!")*, I will attempt to signal the presence of intelligent life on this world *(laughter growing louder)* to the extrasolar representatives. . . ." *(General laughter: cries of "Poppycock," "shame," "withdraw." A rain of pamphlets falls upon the platform. The president calls for order; there being none, he declares the meeting adjourned.)*

Emily's Diary; 22nd April 1909

I do believe there are strange and magical things in Bridestone Wood! Real magic, magic of sky and stone and sea, the magic of the Old People, the Good People who live in the halls beneath the hills. Oh, this sounds foolish, this sounds like whimsy, but last night I looked out of my bedroom window and saw lights up there on Ben Bulben, like the lights of many lanterns there on the slopes of the hill, as if there were folk dancing by lantern light in a ring around the Bridestone. Mrs. O'Carolan used to tell me stories of the faerie lords who would take their mortal brides by the joining of hands through the hole in the middle of the Bridestone. Could this have been such a faerie wedding? For as the hour of midnight

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struck, the dancing lights lifted from under the shadow of Ben Bulben and flew through the air into the west; over Craigdarrah, over this very roof! As I leaned out to watch I imagined I could hear the whinnying of the faerie horses and the laughter of the host of the air and the playing of the faerie harpers.

Oh diary, it was such a wonder! My heart would still be full to the brim with it but for the shadow that has fallen across both it and Craigdarragh. Ever since Papa's return from Dublin there has been the most horrid atmosphere in the house. I wanted to tell him all about the wonderful things I have seen, but Mama warned me not to disturb him, for he has locked himself up in his observatory and works like a man possessed by demons, growling angrily at the least annoyance. Whatever has happened in Dublin has so soured the atmosphere that my Easter has been quite spoiled, and now there is another shadow hanging over me; in two days I must return to Cross and Passion. That horrible place. . . . Oh come quickly summer! Even now I am counting the hours until I am home again, in Craigdarragh, beneath the shadow of Ben Bulben, where the faerie folk are waiting for me. . . .

"Craigdarragh"
Drumcliffe
Co. Sligo
26th April
My dear Lord Fitzgerald,

I am deeply, deeply grateful for your letter dated April 24th in which Your Lordship expressed an interest, and indeed pledged support for, my project to communicate with the transstellar vehicle from the star Wolfe 359. I am glad that your Lordship was spared the humiliation of my embarrassment before the Society; would that I had been spared it myself. Christians to the lions, my dear Claremorris, were none such as I. Yet like those early martyrs, my faith is undiminished, my zeal for the successful pursuance of Project Pharos is greater than ever: we shall teach these arrogant pedagogues a thing or two when the star-folk come! And I am delighted, no less honored, to hear that Your Lordship has submitted a letter of support for my propositions to the chairman of the Society, though I regret that, for all Your Lordship's cogent arguments, it will achieve little: the gentlemen of Dublin are not as open-minded to revolutionary concepts as we men of the West.

Now ensured of support, we may proceed apace with "Project Pharos," and I enclose blueprints for the signaling device. Nevertheless, I will here summarize its principle in my own hand, lest my enthusiasm in drafting the designs has rendered my diagrams a trifle incomprehensible.

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The device takes the form of a cross of floating pontoons supporting electrically powered lanterns. The cross must necessarily be of immense size: I have estimated that to be visible from astronomical distances the arms will have to be five miles in diameter. This of course necessitates the use of the pontoon; an artifact of such size could not be accommodated on land, but on sea it is a relatively simple task to construct, and possesses the additional benefit of being clearly distinguishable from the humbler lamps of civilization, namely, those of Sligo town. The electrical supply for the pontoons can be cheaply provided by my brother-in-law, Mr. Michael Barry, of the Sligo, Leitrim, Fermanagh, and South Donegal Electrical Supply Company. How useful it is to have relations in places of influence! Indeed, he has successfully influenced the recent disruptions of Craigdarragh's electrical supply, which Your Lordship will remember from the night of my daughter's birthday. The man he personally dispatched, a Mr. MacAteer of Enniskillen, a dour Presbyterian but quite the man with the electricals, has eradicated the power failures which plagued us that night and indeed for most of the Easter time.

Here, Your Lordship, I must beg leave to conclude. I once again thank the marquis for his kind patronage of this experiment which will surely be regarded by history as one of the epochal events of the millenium. I will keep Your Lordship closely informed of further developments, particularly my compiling of a code with which to signal the presence of guiding intelligence to the Wolfii, as I have termed them, and finally wish God's richest blessing upon Your Lordship's self and all at Claremorris House, especially the Lady Alexandra, who is never far from our affections here at Craigdarragh.

I remain your Lordship's devoted servant,
Edward Garret Desmond Ph.D.

Crucis Dolorosa: 14th May 1909: (Cross and Passion School magazine)

To my Faerie Lover

Oh, would that we were many things,
My golden-shining love and I;
Bright-flashing scales, a pair of wings
That draw the moonlight down the sky,
Two hazel trees beside the stream,
Wherein our fruit in autumn drop
A trout, a stag, a wild swan's dream,
An eagle's cry on mountain top.
For we have both been many things;

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A thousand lifetimes we have known
Each other, and our love yet sings.
But there is more that I would own.
Oh, that we could but naked run
Through forests deep and forests fair,
Our breasts laid open to the sun,
Our flesh caressed by summer's air,
And in some hidden, leafy glen
My striving body you would take;
Impale me on your lust and then
Me Queen of Daybreak you would make.
And we would dance and we would sing
And we in passion's fist would cry;
Loud with our love the woods would ring
If we were lovers, you and I.
If we were lovers, I and you,
I would cast off all mortal ills
And you would take me, Shining Lugh,
To feast within the Hollow Hills.
For the world of men is filled with tears
And swift the night of science falls
And I would leave those tears and fears
To dance with you in Danu's Halls.
So let us cast our cares away
And live like bright stars in the sky.
Dance dream-clad till the break of day,
For we are lovers, you and I.

Emily Desmond, Class 5a, Cross & Passion School

Dr. Edward Garret Desmond's personal diary: 28th May 1909

Work is proceeding apace on the signaling device. The laborers are addressing themselves to their tasks with an enthusiasm I would like to attribute to their desire to communicate with higher intelligences but I fear is due rather to Lord Fitzgerald's generous purse. Already the first pontoon sections have been floated into Sligo Harbor and the lanterns have been tested and found to work satisfactorily. Such successes are heartening after the delays and confusions of the early weeks. The plan is to assemble the cross from one hundred and seventy-six pontoon sections, each one hundred yards long. This sounds a daunting proposition, given the brevity of time before the space vehicle attains perigee, but

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the sections have been largely pre-assembled in the town boatyards and only remain to be floated and bolted into their final form. Observing the great legion of laborers (of which there are no shortage in this poverty-stricken county) I have no fear that "Project Pharos" will not be completed by the allotted date.

My outstanding concern, that of devising a universally comprehensible mode of communication with which to converse with the Wolfii, has been recently resolved to my complete satisfaction. It is a universal truth that the laws of mathematics are the same upon the worlds of Wolfe 359 as they are upon this one; to wit, the ratio of the circle's circumference to its radius, which we call *pi,* must be as familiar to the Wolfii as to us. Therefore I have designed an electrical relay whereby one arm of the cross will flash its lights twenty-two times for the other's seven, this being the approximate fractional ratio of *pi.* Such a signal cannot fail to attract the attention of our stellanauts and pave the way to more intimate conversation, a code for which I am currently devising using primes and exponents.

"Craigdarragh"
Drumcliffe Road
Co. Sligo
My dearest Constance,

Just a brief note to express my heartfelt thanks for your generous invitation to visit you at Lissadell House to attend a reading by Mr. W. B. Yeats of his most recent poetic works. I shall certainly accept your kind invitation and, if it is not presuming too much upon your generosity, I wonder if perhaps I might bring my daughter Emily? She will shortly be returning from Cross and Passion School (where, I fear, she is far from happy, the dear child, constantly fretful and distressed in her work, and, so I am informed by Mother Superior, given to strange delusions and fantasies), and I know nothing would thrill her more than to hear Mr. Yeats reading his own incomparable poetry: she, like myself, is a great admirer of Mr. Yeats, especially his earlier works: his mythological world of gods and fighting men has quite stimulated her! I was recently sent a copy of a poem she wrote in English class; not bad, quite racy even, and showing definite promise, though it was not this promise that prompted Mother Superior to send it to me, I think, but the overtly sensual content of some of the imagery. Honestly, Constance, these church-schools! I cannot understand Edward's insistence that she be educated by the sisters; this is the twentieth century; this is the age of the new Renaissance, the Celtic dawn!

Forgive me, the affair has made me quite flush with outrage. What I

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am trying to convey is that if it is acceptable, I will bring Emily on the date you suggest, and I thank you once again for your kindness, generosity and hospitality.
Yours sincerely,
Caroline Desmond

Emily's diary: 29th June 1909

Oh, to be in Craigdarragh now that summer's here! I do declare that the moment the train steamed out of Amicons St. Station I could smell the wild honeysuckle and the purple heather on the slopes of Ben Bulben! Despite the warnings of the guard, I must have traveled almost the whole way home with my head out of the window, just breathing in the smell of wild summer.

After I said hello to Mama and Papa (what a strange mood he is in still, the silly man!), the first thing I did was to revisit Bridestone Wood and taste again the ancient magic that I have felt calling me, calling me, every hour of every day I was imprisoned in Cross and Passion. And now, as I try to write about what I experienced, my hand trembles and I feel guilty, though I should not, for then I did not care, not one bit.

Today Bridestone Wood was alive as I have never known it before. Every leaf, every twig, every blade of grass, every drop of dew breathed magic, the old Magic of stone, sea and sky, and it was so quiet I could hear the trees breathing. The air was full of the perfume of green growing things and the soft green grass was calling out for the touch of my bare feet. I imagined I was a fair princess, a woman of the De Danaan, the Ever-Living Ones, and I slipped quickly, willingly under the spell of the green woods. In an instant I had cast off my horrible, tight, constricting clothes and I ran naked and free as a sunbeam through the summer glens. How wonderful I felt! It was like the poem I had written for the school competition, but this time there was no Sister Assumpta, black and white like a folded up newspaper, to tell me I was proud, sensual, and sinful. I was beautiful, I was proud, I would not be driven onto my knees to pray and pray for deliverance from the sins of the flesh; I loved the flesh, I loved the grass beneath my feet and the thin willow wands which whipped my body did not scourge me for my sins but blessed me with their golden pollen. I did not care if I never saw my clothes again, I wanted to be like this forever, free from the petty, jealous restrictions of the human world, free from the sterile bleakness of Cross and Passion and my poor father. At length I collapsed onto a bank of moss beneath an ancient druid oak.

When the voice called my name I was afraid and ashamed of my nakedness, but it called again, my name, "Emily," in a voice so sweet

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I thought it was the singing of a bird. Three times the voice called before I could reply with a "Who's there?" Then I saw a golden glow moving through the trees toward me. I should have been frightened but I was not, I could not be; I knew that no harm was intended me. As the light drew nearer I saw that it was a golden wheel, rolling by its own power, with five spokes, like a cartwheel, only smaller and finer, much as I have always imagined a chariot wheel to be. It rolled toward me and spoke to me, telling me not to be afraid (and indeed, I was not afraid, not one bit), that the time was not yet come for me to meet the wheel's faerie master, but that it would come soon and now I was to follow the wheel so that I might return to the realm of men.

I cannot remember, dear diary, where I followed the magical wheel, nor the least part of what transpired until I found myself upon the south edge of Bridestone Wood, but it must have been something strange and exceedingly wonderful, for clasped upon my left arm was a golden horseshoe torque of the kind that faerie kings give to their faerie queens as a token of love and faithfulness. The torque I have hidden in my secret hidey-hole, for no one would understand it, but I am setting everything down in your pages, dear diary, so that I will never forget the wonderfulness of it. But diary, my secret, most trusted friend, if it was so magical, so wonderful, why do I feel I have sinned?

Edward Garret Desmond's personal diary: 8th July 1909

I here pause in my records of "Project Pharos" (which is proceeding to my complete satisfaction) to comment upon a matter of a personal nature which is causing me not inconsiderable distress. I refer, of course, to the increasingly irrational behavior of my daughter Emily. Since her return from Dublin she has floated around Craigdarragh as if in a daydream, paying only the scantest attention to her father and his epochal work, head filled rather with fantastic nonsense about faeries and mythological creatures haunting Bridestone Wood. And as if this was not enough, she has borrowed (taken without permission, rather!) one of my portable cameras which I was using to photograph the Wolfii vehicle, to take a series of photographs of these "faerie folk" at play in the woods around the demesne. I have seen these photographs; they are doubtless forgeries of greater or lesser skill. What I cannot understand is my daughter's absolute insistence upon the objective truth of these fantastical notions. She believes utterly that she has taken factual photographs of supernatural creatures. Is she doing this out of spite for me and my rational, scientific philosophy of life in a pique of adolescent rebellion? We had the most fearful row, Emily demanding that she was not a little girl any

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longer, that she was a woman and that I treat her accordingly, and I, arguing with gentle persuasiveness and calm rationality, maintaining that to be treated like a woman she cannot revel in the childish hysterias of little girls. Alas nothing ws resolved and worse still, Emily has won Caroline over to her side.

Caroline intends to take Emily to Lissadell House and show these photographs to Mrs. Gore-Booth and Mr. William Butler Yeats, the famous poet, who will be delivering a reading there. Mr. Yeats is a man for whose poetry I have the highest regard but for whose superstitious fancies of gods and warriors and mythological hosts of the air I have no time, and I know with sure and certain knowledge that no good will come of his involvement in these ludicrous proceedings.

But that I had more time to spend with Emily! Maybe then she would not have wandered heedless into the realms of fantasy and whimsy! I fear I have not been a proper father to her, but the advent of the starfolk will turn all our human relationships upon their heads.

Finally, the electrical fluctuations that bedeviled the house at Easter have resumed and are more frequent and of longer duration. I shall have to have words with Mr. Michael Barry of the Sligo, Leitrim, Fermanagh, and South Donegal Electrical Supply Company, and his dour employee Mr. MacAteer. What is more disturbing, and mystifying, is that objects have been moved around my observatory at night after I have locked up and left. Papers, books, chairs, tables, all have gone astray, and, most perplexing of all, my antique brass orrery, weighing nigh on a ton, was moved right out of the observatory into the gardens! The lesser items I could attribute to Emily in a pique of spite, but the orrery takes ten strong laborers to even budge! Alas that I have not the time for such mysteries at present; the demands of the Wolfii are paramount.

"Craigdarragh"
Drumcliffe
Co. Sligo
16th July 1909
My dearest Constance,

Just a short note to let you know how thrilled I was to read in your letter that Mr. William Butler Yeats in person will be coming to talk with Emily about the faerie photographs, and what is more, bringing with him Mr. Hannibal Rooke, the celebrated hypnotist and investigator of supernatural phenomena. Of course I shall be delighted to accommodate Mr. Yeats and his colleague for a few days toward the end of this month, if they, for their part, will excuse the somewhat chaotic state of the house—my husband's experiments, you understand, he has everything quite topsy-

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turvy. Quite frankly, Constance, I cannot see any benefit from what he is doing; are not our photographic proofs of another world coexistent with our own more significant than his fanciful communications with the inhabitants of another star? Poor Lord Fitzgerald, I sometimes think he agreed to this quixotic escapade merely to humor Edward. Be that as it may, I must once again thank you, Constance, for all your support and hard work and I look forward enormously to seeing you on the 27th when Mr. Yeats comes.
Yours sincerely,
Caroline Desmond

Excerpts from the Craigdarragh Interviews: 27th, 28th, 29th July 1909, as transcribed by Mr. Peter Driscoll B.A. of Sligo

(The first interview: 9:30 p.m., 27th July. Present: Mr. W. B. Yeats, Mr. H. Rooke, Mrs. C. Desmond, Miss E. Desmond, Mrs. C. Gore-Booth, Mr. P. Driscoll. Weather: windy with some rain.)

W. B. Yeats: You are quite certain she is in the hypnotic trance and receptive to my questioning, Mr. Rooke?

H. Rooke: Quite sure, Mr. Yeats.

W. B. Yeats: Very well then. Emily, can you hear me?

Emily: Yes, sir.

W. B. Yeats: Tell me, Emily, have these photographs you have shown me been falsified in any way?

Emily: No, sir.

W. B. Yeats: So these are genuine pictures of faerie folk, then.

(No reply)

H. Rooke: You must question the subject directly, Mr. Yeats.

W. B. Yeats: Forgive me, I forgot. Tell me, Emily, are these photographs actual representations of supernatural beings? Faeries?

Emily: Faeries? Of course they are faeries, the old folk, the Ever-Living Ones.

W. B. Yeats: Thank you, Emily, that is what I wanted to know. Now that we have established that these are real photographs of real faeries, could you tell me, Emily, on how many occasions were these photographs taken?

Emily: Three occasions: once in the morning, twice in the early afternoon. Three days. Then. . . .

W. B. Yeats: Go on, Emily. . . .

Emily: It was as if they didn't want me to take any more

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photographs of them; they grew cold and distant, like there was a cloud over the sun. They don't like mechanical things, the Old Folk, they don't like cold, hard, iron human-made things.

W. B. Yeats: Thank you, Emily.

(The second interview: 9:50 P.M., 28th July. Present: as above. Weather: wind gusting from the west, with showers.)

W. B. Yeats: As we have no photographic evidence of either your earliest or most recent encounters with the faerie folk, could you describe for us please these Lords of the Ever-Living Ones?

Emily: *(her face becoming ecstatic)* They are the fairest of the fair, the sons of Danu; there are none to compare with the comeliness of the dwellers in the hollow hills: no son of Milesius, no daughter of proud Maeve aslumber on cold Knocknarea. Their cloaks are of scarlet wool, their tunics of fine Greek silk. Upon their breasts they wear the badge of the Red Branch Heroes, upon their brows circlets of yellow gold; their skin is white as milk, their hair black as the raven's wing, the glint of iron spear-points is in their eyes, and their lips are red as blood. Fair they are, the sons of Danu, but none so fair nor so noble as my love, Lugh of the Long Hand. Strong-thewed he is, golden-maned, golden-skinned; clad in the green and the gold of the royal Dun at Brugh-na-Boinne; he is Lugh, my love, my King-of-the-Morning, and I am his Queen-of-the-Day, and this token of his everlasting love he has given to me. . . .

(Several murmurs of astonishment were heard among the witnesses as Miss Desmond produced a golden bracelet from beneath her dress.)

H. Rooke: Good grief! A Celtic arm torque!

W. B. Yeats: Emily? Can you hear me, Emily?

Emily: I can hear you, Mr. Yeats.

W. B. Yeats: Emily, where did you get this from? This is most important. . . . Damnation, what was that?

Mrs. C. Desmond: I'm so sorry, it's another of those mysterious electrical failures I mentioned to you yesterday. Mrs. O'Carolan . . . Mrs. O'Carolan . . . lamps please. Gentlemen, if you wish, we may continue by lamplight.

H. Rooke: Thank you, Mrs. Desmond, but with this new evi-

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dence being produced in such a dramatic way I think it would be best if we were to retire to draw up a new line of questioning.

W. B. Yeats: Yes, we have put poor Emily through quite enough for one evening. Mr. Rooke . . . the trance. . . .

(The third interview: 3:30 P.M., 29th July 1909. Present: as above, with the addition of Dr. E. G. Desmond. Weather: cloudy, threatening rain from the west.)

W. B. Yeats: This faerie lover who gave the torque to you, Emily; tell us about him, will you?

Emily: *(Growing animated)* Ah, Lugh, Lugh, King of the Morning, Master of the Thousand Skills; there is none to compare with him in music or archery, poetry or the feats of war, hunting or the tender accomplishments of love *(here Dr. Desmond blushed)*—we are riders on the wings of the morning, he and I, we are dancers in the starlight halls of Tir-Nan-Og, and with the sunset we rise in the shapes of swans, joined at the necks by chains and collars of red gold and journey to the Land of the Sunrise where we begin our wonderous journey of love again. We have tasted the hazelnuts of the Tree of Wisdom; we have been many things, many shapes; wild swans upon the lake of Coole, two arbutuses twined together upon a mountainside, white birds upon the foam of the sea, we have been trees, we have been leaping silver salmon, wild horses, red foxes, noble deer; brave warriors, proud kings, sage wizards. . . .

W. B. Yeats: Thank you, Emily. Now, if you could please tell us, what is the precise significance of the torque which was given to you in this otherworldly drama?

Emily: *(with consternation)* Why, I am the Queen-of-the-Morning, I am the mortal woman taken to be the immortal bride through the hole in the Bride-stone . . . I am . . . I have . . . they have told me I have the power of the deep magic.

W. B. Yeats: Deep magic? What is that, Emily?

Emily: The power of wishing, the power of transformation, the power to change nature at the most fundamental level of its being.

H. Rooke: Excuse me, Mr. Yeats, but this is incredible.

W. B. Yeats: Yes? Oh, thank you, Emily, that will be all for the

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moment. Go on, Mr. Rooke.

H. Rooke: This is incredible: the girl seems to be referring to herself as the embodiment of the Morrigan, the Celtic myth of the shape-changer. The mythological sources seem to hint that the Morrigan does not transform herself so much as transform the perceptions, even the reality itself, of those about her. This is quite fascinating, Mr. Yeats. We must continue immediately.

E. G. Desmond: I am afraid not. I must protest. My daughter is not some sideshow or circus freak for your amusement. I will not tolerate her further humiliation before her own father and mother, no, I will not tolerate it, nor will I tolerate any more of this . . . idle superstitious tommyrot masquerading in the guise of science and reason! Gentlemen, I must demand that you terminate these . . . these . . . parlor tricks forthwith! My daughter's childhood years will not be muddied by your unscientific vaporings! Caroline, I wish to speak with you. . . .

Extracts from Dr. Edward Garret Desmond and Lord Fitzgerald of Claremorris's paper submitted to the Irish Astronomical Bulletin: *not accepted for publication.*

On the 8th August at 12:15 P.M. it was observed that the transstellar vehicle had ceased generating explosions, having shed sufficient velocity to match the pedestrian pace of our solar system. Its final proper motion was approximated to be fifteen miles per second.

The vehicle maintained course and velocity over the days preceding perigee. It was not until the night of the 27th August that conditions were suitable for the experiment. That night the sky was clear, Sligo Bay uncommonly calm, and the extra-solar vehicle two days from the perigee of 156,000 miles. At 9:25 P.M. the signal was activated and for a period of two hours the primary communication code was transmitted; that is, *pi* expressed as the approximate ratio of twenty-two over seven. This sequence was repeated every two hours for two hours until local dawn at 6:25 A.M. Simultaneous with the operation of the stellagraph, the vessel was closely observed through the Craigdarragh 18-inch reflector telescope. No change in luminosity was observed.

After nightfall on the following day, August 28th, it again being clear and calm, the floating stellagraph was again activated, transmitting the

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pi ratio for an hour, then flashing the natural exponent *e* expressed as the approximate fraction of nineteen over seven. As before, this cycle was repeated every two hours for two hours. As before the spatial object was closely observed through telescopes.

At 3:19 A.M. the luminosity of the object suddenly increased drastically for an extremely short period of time: a flash. After a short pause came another flash, a short pause, then a third. The flashes were observed to be regular in interval, and timing of the intervals proved them to be 3.141 seconds in duration: *pi* to three decimal places. Sensitive and accurate timing equipment would doubtless reveal the periods to be accurate to a far greater number of places. It was also discovered, quite by chance, that the duration of the flashes themselves corresponded with similar accuracy to the natural base *e*.

(Several sections omitted here)

Emily's diary: 28th August 1909

I know they are there, I can feel them, I can hear them, calling for me, calling me by harp and flute, calling me away away away, away from the mortal world, into the dream-time, into the never-ending dance. They are afraid, they hide themselves under the eaves of Bridestone Wood, but I know they are there, waiting for me. It is the great light in the sea they are afraid of; it is evil, they say, it is steel and iron and hard hard coldness, but they have braved its man-light to fetch me to the Bridestone: the bride to the Bridestone.

All the day long my heart has yearned for my Lugh, and now as the silver spear-points gather in Bridestone Wood and the faerie steeds stamp their hooves in impatience, I long to cry to the mountains, "Not long, not long, the mortal bride comes, she comes." All is ready. I have braided my hair, I have cast off my confining human clothes and on my wrist I wear the token of Lugh's love, the golden torque; I only delay to set down these words in you, dear diary, for after tonight I do not know if I shall ever return to you again. Maybe then someone will read your pages and sigh and pine for the love they contain, and maybe understand. I am a woman! I am a woman! I am not a child! I am Queen of Morning, my heart has passed through the hole at the center of the Bridestone into the land of the Ever-Living Ones.

Dr. Edward Garret Desmond's personal diary: 29th August 1909

I awaited last night with the thrilled expectancy of a child awaiting

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Christmas. I could hardly wait for darkness to descend and communications reestablished with the otherworlders. At the pre-arranged hour Lord Fitzgerald down in Sligo town operated the floating stellagraph and transmitted our recognition signal. From my observatory I could see the floating cross of pontoons, filling all of Sligo Bay, flashing our proud message of will and intellect to the stars. Almost immediately the space vehicle replied in kind with a series of pulsed emissions from its mighty star-engine: again, *pi* and *e*.

It was then that the first of the night's bizarre occurrences happened. All of a sudden the observatory was plunged into Stygian gloom. By now accustomed to these failures of the electrical supply, I lit the oil lamps I have had installed with just such a contingency in mind. Then Mrs. O'Carolan rushed in from the main house in a terrible to-do, flustered and flapping and gabbling something about the current having failed over the whole county. I abandoned my telescope and reached the window just in time to see the lights of my fine floating stellagraph plunge into darkness. Just as abruptly the glow from Sligo town vanished as if some vast hand had snuffed it out. As I was later to learn from the pages of the *Irish Times,* the electrical supply for the entire northwest of Ireland was blacked out (a good descriptive phrase for a semi-literate journalist) at its source in the generator chambers of the Sligo, Leitrim, Fermanagh, and South Donegal Supply Company for a period of four hours. As yet ignorant of this, I was greatly fearful at the time and imagined for an instant that my signal lights had brought some dreadful star-doom down upon our earth. Then the second bizarrity occurred.

The star-vehicle, which I had kept under observation in my telescope, suddenly emitted a stream of pulsed lights. It took me a moment to clear my befuddled wits and recognize the underlying pattern, and I must confess that when I did, I was astounded to the point of stupefaction. It was Morse code! What is more, a Morse code transmission in English! How the Wolfii achieved this feat I cannot imagine; all I could do was hastily jot down the signals which I noted, even in my incredulous state, were in the form of repeated cycles of messages. I have since transcribed them and note them down herewith.

Greetings . . . greetings . . . greetings
He of dawn to:
Transformer
Translator
Shaper of Reality
We return thy power to thee:
Shaped we
Translated we
Transformed we

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By she of the sunlight.
Greeting . . . greetings . . . greetings.

The message was repeated over three hundred times. And now I must record the greatest mystery of that mysterious night. At 12:16 A.M. the object flared again, taking me quite by surprise and momentarily blinding me. When I regained my customary clarity of vision I observed that the space-vehicle was accelerating by the same means I had hypothesized: titanic explosions of stellar force, one every four and one-half minutes. The object was leaving the proximity of our earth and traveling in the direction of the constellation Lyra. The star-crosser accelerated thus for fifty-three minutes and then, at three minutes past one, it abruptly vanished from my telescopes.

There was no evidence of any explosion, no burst of light; the object had vanished as utterly as if it had never been: no conjurer vanishing a lady into thin air upon the Dublin stage could have matched that feat, and the vacuum of space is thinner by far than the most rarefied of air.

I searched the heavens frantically for some trace of the great star-vehicle but it was quite gone. As I was musing what might have befallen that brave vessel the electrical supply was restored, all at once and, as I subsequently learned, to the whole of the western seaboard of Ireland.

My head was spinning with imponderables as I tried to ascribe some sense and order to the events of the night. Could there possibly be any connection between the strange happenings? What of the extra-solar's enigmatic message and their mysterious fate? It was upon such musings that I was intent when Caroline burst in upon me to inform me of the dreadful news that Emily had been found wandering in high distress on the Drumcliffe road by a police constable. . . .

From the report of Constable Michael O'Hare, Drumcliffe R.I.C. Station

Upon the night in question I was proceeding on my bicycle along the Sligo Road toward the Rosses Point Police Station where there had been numerous complaints of the sudden failure of the electrical supply to certain well-to-do households. At approximately half-past midnight, as I was passing the place on the road where Bridestone Wood comes down to the sea, I heard a noise like crying and sobbing coming from the edge of the road. I advanced with caution and by the light of my bicycle lamp I saw a young lady huddled by the forest wall in a state of great and obvious distress. She was quite naked, I am ashamed to say, and covered with cuts and bruises. I was unable to console the young lady, so great was her distress, but for the sake of decency and the coolness of the air I lent her my police cape to cover her modesty. I decided to take the

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young lady to the O'Bannon residence, Mullaghboy, not a quarter-mile distant, where a doctor might be fetched. However, she would not consent to be moved from the side of the road. I attempted to glean some inkling of what might have befallen her but what information I did glean was fragmentary and incoherent.

Between sobbing fits the young lady mentioned the Bridestone, brides, the King and Queen and some person, possibly of foreign origin, whose name I took to be Lew. More significantly, she spoke of violation, stolen maidenhood, ravishment and unfaithful lovers. From these statements, her unclad state, and general air of distress, it was apparent to me that some form of improper assault had been made on the young lady. It was therefore imperative that I get her to a safe place where I could summon the necessary medical, police, and priestly assistance. Knowing that any attempt to force her to accompany me would only increase her distress, I finally persuaded her to mount my bicycle and wheeled her to Mullaghboy House. As we turned into the drive, the local electrical supply was suddenly restored. . . .

Extracts from the report of Dr. Hubert Orr, Royal College of Surgeons, Dublin

. . . physical examination of the patient revealed her to have indeed suffered some form of sexual ravagement, resulting in pregnancy, undoubtedly upon the night in question. However, it is not the physical aspects of this case which are so intriguing as the psychological ones. . . .

The recent works of the Viennese Dr. Sigmund Freud have aroused great interest in the subliminal processes of the mind, particularly in the fields of repressed sexual feelings. In the patient's case I feel this to be a significant contributing factor. The repressive regime of the teaching sisters at Cross and Passion School has been well testified to in the girl's diaries, and coupled with her hints as to juvenile dalliance in illicit love with its consequent fear of censure and punishment, would certainly drive her sexual longings deep into what Dr. Freud terms the "subconscious," and seal them there under layer upon layer of guilt.

On her return to the romantically idealized home environment, these restraints were loosened and the patient's sexual imagination ws permitted full play, generating hosts of hysterical delusions: faeries, goblins, warriors, kings, druids; lovers. It is significant that many of the patient's fantasies are unconscious recapitulations of her own earlier imaginings: her poems, the works of W. B. Yeats, the stories of the locality told to her by the cook Mrs. O'Carolan: the seeds of hysteria had been sown and only needed the proper soil to germinate.

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. . . The role of the father is most interesting. It is clear from her early diary entries that the patient idolized her father and his work, yet at the time of the "Craigdarragh incident" she was quite hostile both to him and his work. Why should this be? Perhaps a clue lies in the patient's response to her sixteenth birthday. She clearly considered herself to be a woman in the fullest sense of the word, but her father refused to see her as anything but a little girl, immature and dependent, and it is quite likely that such a hysterical retreat into superstition and mythology was a subconscious backlash against her father and his scientific work. Through her fantasies, the patient was attacking her father.

. . . However, I am utterly at a loss to explain the photographs of the faerie folk: it is not within my sphere of professional competence to proffer any authoritative statement concerning them, though I think it likely that they have been cleverly falsified and that the patient's desire for them to be true was so vital that she lied even under hypnosis. . . .

"Glendun"
Blackrock Road
Blackrock
Co. Dublin
20th September 1909
My dear Mr. Yeats,

I have studied all the material pertaining to the Craigdarragh case with greatest scrutiny, and though I find Dr. Orr's conclusions interesting and farsighted, I do not feel they quite adequately explain the remarkable events to which we were partly privy.

Recent research has uncovered a close relationship between emotionally (read sexually) disturbed adolescents and bizarre psychic activity, such as poltergeists, phantom noises, and strange lights in the sky. The admirable Dr. Orr has applied Freudian theories in one fashion. I would now apply them in another to suggest that in the Craigdarragh case, the patient's repressed sexuality was lashing out from the subconscious in paroxysms of supernormal activity, including the electrical failures, the moving furniture, and ultimately, the faerie manifestations.

With regard to this last point I must warn you that I am engaging in purest speculation when I wonder if it is possible that at a deeply subconscious level, far beyond any yet tapped by hypnosis or theorized by Dr. Freud, the human mind is in direct contact with the underlying structure of the universal all? What I am thinking is that in certain individuals, or under certain circumstances, the barriers between this deep preconsciousness and normal consciousness may be lowered, even abolished, allowing the nature of reality itself to be changed. The power of mind over

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base matter, the power of generating material objects by force of will, has long been maintained by certain Eastern mystics. What I am proposing here is a scientific rationale for this phenomenon.

By now my reasoning should be obvious to you, my dear Willie: in the Craigdarragh case it could indeed be that the faeries were real, generated out of the patient's frustrated sexual longings touching upon the ancient reality-shaping consciousness at the core of her psyche, and that power in turn taking the form of her fancies and fantasies. That she mentioned the Morrigan, the Celtic Shifter of Shapes, is highly significant in this respect: it was the very shape of reality itself that was being shifted!

At first I was convinced that these manifestations were purely subjective; it being a simpler matter to shape a person's perceptions than obstinate matter. Then I paused to reconsider. The evidence of the photographs is compelling, also the golden torque which Dr. Hanrahan of the National Museum has authenticated, and the tragic conclusion of the Craigdarragh episode is proof that the apparitions were sufficiently real to turn on Emily and ravage her. Her guilt never left her and in the end it was this guilt that took hold of her reality-shaping ability to punish her for her sins. Such, I fear, may ever be the penalty for dabbling in powers too mighty for men. We are vessels too weak by far to hold the power of God.

One final observation, and this, my dear Willie, is the most outrageous of all. If Emily could generate a host of the Sidhe (possibly out of the electricity stolen during the power failures?), she could have as easily generated the astronomical object Dr. Desmond maintained was an unearthly space-vehicle. It is only a matter of scale and projection. . . .

Forgive me, Willie, if these words sound like the ravings of a lunatic; I rather fear that some of the implications of this case frankly scare me. But there are too many coincidences between the faerie and the astronomical for any other conclusion to be tenable. The alien craft's signal, in Morse code, in English, is meaningless unless interpreted in terms of Emily's reality-molding imagination; indeed, any other explanation is impossible. Emily created both faerie host and Wolfii, and at the moment of her sexual completion her guilt, her fear, her ultimate destruction, slammed the door between subconscious and preconscious and burst her power like a bubble. The faerie host returned to the Otherworld and the alien star-crossers and their incredible vessel dissolved into the nothingness out of which Emily's mind had called them and imbued them with their brief phantom lives.

In so doing, Emily made Dr. Desmond the laughingstock of the astronomical fraternity: I hear that both he and the Marquis of Claremorris have been severely financially embarrassed by this episode: nevertheless, it seems to me a fitting punishment for daughter to visit upon inadequate father. As the bard says, my dear Willie, "Hell hath no fury like a woman

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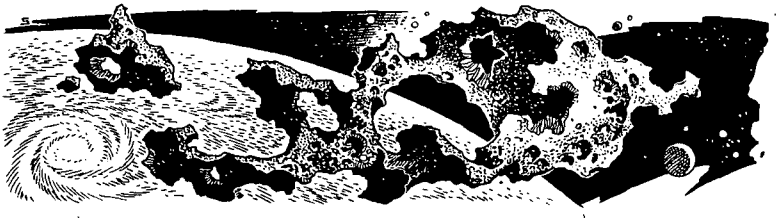
scorned," and I feel that that small word "woman" lies at the heart of the Craigdarragh case. Emily wished to be a woman: now she is a woman, more woman, perhaps, than she desired. I am reminded of another saying, one of our Chinese cousins' proverbs: "Beware what thou wishest, to thee it may be granted." The power of the preconscious mind is too mighty, too lofty, even too terrible a thing to indulge in whimsical wishfulness. Yet Emily's punishment of her father is a two-edged thing upon which she has cut herself. Her punishment is the child she carries within her womb, and a dreadful and cruel punishment it surely is, for that child will stand forever before her as the legacy and constant reminder of the Otherworld she glimpsed and, for just a moment, was part of . . . and which she irrevocably lost. For, as the legends warn us, he who has once heard the horns of Elfland will always hear them calling from beyond the edge of the world.
Yours sincerely,
Hannibal Rooke Esq.

"Craigdarragh"
Drumcliffe
Co. Sligo
5th September 1909
Dear Mother Superior,

Just a brief note to inform you that Emily will not be returning to Cross and Passion School in future. Alas, she has recently suffered a major breakdown of health, and after a spell in Dr. Hubert Orr's renowned Harcourt Street Clinic, will be convalescing at some length here at home in Craigdarragh. It will be many months, I fear, before Emily regains her health fully. So I take this opportunity to thank you for what you have done for her in the past: education is a pearl beyond price in this modern world, and I hope that the private tutors we are hiring will build upon your solid foundation.

In parting I would ask for your prayers for Emily's safe and full recovery and, as ever, all my thoughts and prayers are for my unfortunate daughter.
Sincerely,
Caroline Desmond ●



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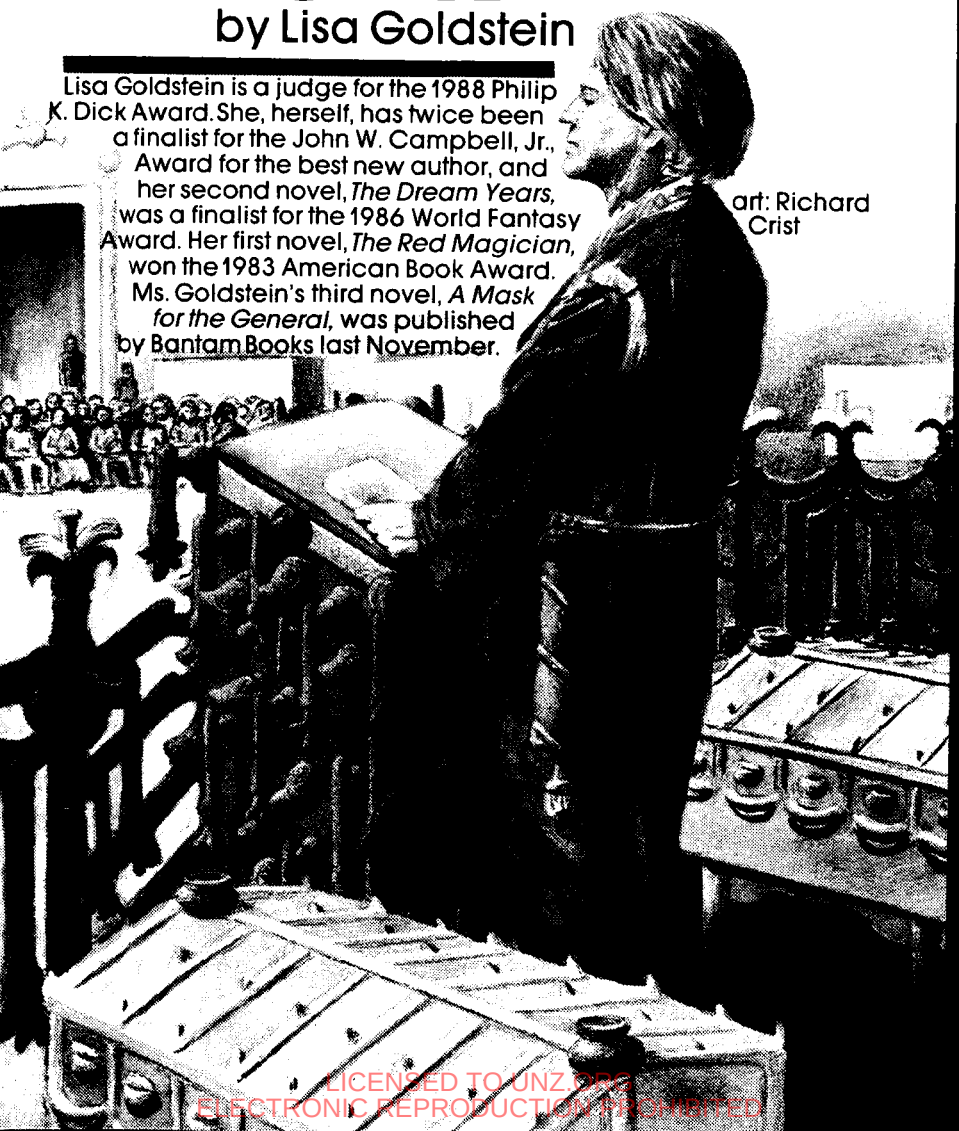
AFTER THE MASTER

by Lisa Goldstein

Lisa Goldstein is a judge for the 1988 Philip K. Dick Award. She, herself, has twice been a finalist for the John W. Campbell, Jr., Award for the best new author, and her second novel, *The Dream Years*, was a finalist for the 1986 World Fantasy Award. Her first novel, *The Red Magician*, won the 1983 American Book Award. Ms. Goldstein's third novel, *A Mask for the General*, was published by Bantam Books last November.

art: Richard Crist



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23*13*56

The first thing I noticed when we landed was the dryness. As the ship set down on the vast plain that serves as Khana's spaceport, as we crowded at the viewing port, watching the trucks lumbering up to meet us, I felt the heat press down on me, dry my nose and the back of my throat. Well, good, I thought. That's what I came for, after all. Dryness, sharpness, clarity.

In the moments before we disembarked I thought of Lossara, not of my panic of the last few weeks—the chaos, the recriminations and the terror—but of Lossara as I remembered it before the coming of the master. The oceans, the lakes, streams, showers, gales, drizzles, and above all the rainbows arcing over the old forests, the towers, the rainbow flag flying over the capital. And as I left the truck and walked down the ramp and though an echoing corridor, I saw a series of posters depicting other planets in the Arrow sector, and at the end the famous picture of the rainbow over the castle at Collombe. "Visit Lossara, Planet of Rainbows," the poster, old and faded, said. I laughed. It seemed a good omen to find something of Lossara before the master.

I have decided to start this journal in the hopes that I can make some sense of what happened to me. I am sitting in my hotel room (fortunately someone at the spaceport spoke Sostha and was able to direct me to a good hotel; one of the first things I will have to do is find some enhancers and a good language teacher) wondering where I should go from here. It is evening but the heat is still intense. Out in the streets the city seems very much awake.

23*13*58

Good news! Yesterday I left my name in various nets and was able to find a teacher of Chuq by evening. We spoke briefly over the net. She is from Lossara and speaks Sostha, tall, a little gangly but quite competent-looking. She told me where to get enhancers and assured me that I will speak Chuq like a native in thirty days, which is, she says, how long it took her. She made no mention of the trouble on Lossara, of the master, for which I'm very grateful. It means she's not the type to pry. We start lessons tomorrow.

Walked along the streets today until the heat forced me indoors, to the coolness of the hotel bar. The language is harsh, guttural, sounds almost like spitting. I can't imagine speaking it at all, let alone like a native. But I like the contrast with Sostha's easy sibilance, and I'm eager to learn. I'm frustrated by not being able to make myself understood—it forces me into introspection, and today, for the first time, I thought about whether I want to stay here or go on. When I left Lossara I had no idea

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where I was going, just took the first ship out. Now I wonder if I should have planned things better.

23*13*59

With the help of the enhancers I was able to have an entire inane conversation in Chuq with Esseri, my language teacher. "Hello, how are you?" "I am fine, and you?" and so on. It was a relief to turn to Sostha afterwards and talk about more interesting things. She told me that she is a housegrower, and I expressed surprise that anything can grow in this climate, let alone houses. But she said her guild has developed some very strong drought-resistant strains, related to cactus, that do quite well on Khana. She had to study these on Lossara, along with strains for every planet in the Arrow sector, when she went for her guild membership, and she said she remembers wondering why. As she talked it occurred to me that she was like the houses she grew, strong, drought-resistant. (We were in the hotel bar at this point, on our second or third drink.)

"And you," she said. "What brings you here?"

For some reason I had not come up with a cover story to explain my flight to Khana. I could have told her it was none of her business, but I enjoyed our first lesson and wanted her to come back. "I got caught up in that whole mess with the master," I said. "I had to leave."

She looked at me speculatively. "The master," she said finally. "You know, that's the first thing my partner Dav asked me when I told him I was from Lossara—'Did you ever see the master?' I had to tell him that it's a big planet, that most people just went on with their lives without thinking about the master. Though I did see him once, when I was just walking down the street, and a huge crowd was coming the other way, his entourage, I guess. They were all saying, 'Make way for the master, make way for the master,' and I moved over to the side. I tried to see him, of course, but all I saw was this sort of tall distinguished-looking man surrounded by a bunch of other people. He didn't do anything while I was watching. And that was it. Dav was disappointed." She looked at me again, apparently gathering courage for her next question. "So you knew him, huh?"

"Yes," I said. "I was probably one of those people saying, 'Make way for the master.' I did a lot of crazy things in those days."

"Were you there—at the end?" she asked.

"I really don't want to talk about it," I said.

"Okay," she said. She was obviously hoping for more. We made arrangements to meet in two days for another lesson, and she left.

Later—I wish I hadn't told Esseri so much. Several of the news-nets

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are probably anxious to interview someone who knew the master personally. I told her not to tell anyone, and I'm sure she won't, but still—

I shouldn't drink so much. But I'm so lonely, I need to talk to someone, even though no one here can possibly understand what it was like. Maybe we shouldn't meet at the hotel, so close to the bar. When I drink it's as if a box opens somewhere in my soul and all their faces come out, all of them, the ones I thought I'd forgotten, the ones I've tried to forget. I miss them all already, even my wife, even the master—Oh God, the splendor of the master!

23*14*01

Reread the maudlin stuff I wrote yesterday and resolved not to drink again.

Feeling fairly daring I went to the bank today to see if my funds have been transferred yet. Of course it was far too early to attempt a conversation of that complexity in Chuq, and in the end the manager had to call out someone who spoke Sostha. But the good news is that the funds have been transferred, and I can stay here as long as I like. As I left the bank I reflected that it was only sheer luck that I never gave the master my family's money, as my wife kept urging me to do. Of course if he'd asked me I would have done it without thinking.

Bought a turban at a shop next door to the bank. Now I flatter myself I look like everyone else.

Put off all decisions about how long I'll stay here until tomorrow.

23*14*02

There was some kind of holiday today and I became worried that Esseri would not make our lesson. I tried to get through to her on the net but the lines were tied up, so finally, with a great deal of trepidation, I went to her house in an unfamiliar part of the city. Her house, I saw with surprise, was not grown but made. Then I realized she probably wouldn't be able to afford a grown house.

She was just leaving. "Dav says there's something wrong with the roots on a house we're doing," she said. "You can come along, if you're not doing anything else."

The holiday spirit of the city had begun to depress me, and I quickly agreed. We pushed our way through crowds of people in gauzy, brightly colored clothes—stripes of yellow and black, red and green, blue and yellow—and finally made our way to the outskirts. Dav was already there, sitting on a three-foot wall, drinking something that Esseri proudly told me was distilled from a variety of the plant they were building the house with. He offered me a bottle. I declined.

Esseri and Dav checked the roots of a young wall, only a half a foot

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high, while I leaned against a taller wall, trying to stay in the shade. After a while they joined me.

Esseri said something to Dav, and I caught my name and the word "Lossara." Dav looked at me with interest and said something in Chuq. He is dark, with surprisingly light blue eyes. His hands and clothes were very dirty, but his turban was a dazzling white. Esseri translated his question. "He wants to know if you've ever met the master," she said. I thought she was challenging me.

"Tell him no, I haven't," I said.

She said something to Dav, Dav answered, and they talked back and forth for a while. I could understand only a word or two. Finally she said, "Dav says he would have followed the master if he'd been on Lossara."

"Tell him he wouldn't have liked it," I said. "But by that time it would have been too late."

When she translated this Dav had more questions, four or five it sounded like. I regretted that I ever said anything. "I'm going back to the hotel," I said finally. "I'll meet you there for my lesson."

The lesson went well but I was in a bad mood. When Esseri suggested we go down to the bar for a drink I refused.

23*14*04

Apologized to Esseri after today's lesson for my rudeness to her. "It's all right," she said. "I can understand if you don't want to talk about it."

"It's not that I don't want to talk about it," I said. The holiday, whatever it was, had lasted late into the night. Fireworks had kept me up, and then yesterday I'd felt unbearably lonely. I wanted to talk to someone. "It's that no one understands. No one can understand, unless he was there. Dav's an idiot."

She nodded, waiting. The choice was mine. I took a deep breath and said, "It's true, everything you've heard about him. I saw miracles, even some of the famous ones. I saw that woman's foot grow back, saw her break down and cry when she started to walk. He decided he didn't like the color of our meeting hall one day and it changed, just like that, from grey to red. A man came up to him and begged for a place with him, said he'd lost his job, had no money, he was starving, and the master rained gold coins on him, covered him up to his neck in coins. Then he laughed. A horrible laugh—I hear it in my dreams sometimes. See, everyone thinks the master was—was some sort of god. That he was good. I guess they have to think that. But he wasn't. He was just a man, but with this strange power. And he abused it. That beggar broke two ribs under all that gold. And someone told me he saw a man ask the master to heal his arm, and when the man left he was screaming. The master had taken

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off his other arm. I believe it. Those were the things that never got on the news. He wouldn't let them get out."

Esseri was quiet. I looked for doubt, didn't see it but said anyway, "I know—you don't believe me. You probably think it's mass hypnosis, or something. That's what the police said, after—after—But if it's hypnosis, why is the meeting hall still red? Even the police thought it was red, and they couldn't have been hypnotized. They said it had probably been red all along."

"I believe you," Esseri said. "Don't forget, I lived on Lossara, too. I heard things— What you say isn't any surprise to me." She hesitated. "But why did you stay if it was so bad? Did the master force you?"

"No," I said. "He didn't force anyone. And we all stayed. See, you don't—you can't understand. It was like being on Earth, those old stories about the time of Merlin and King Arthur. There was magic being done. Magic has a force—it's compelling. It overrides everything else. I thought, while I was with him, that I was happy. That it was the happiest time of my life, that I was privileged to be there. It was only later that I saw the horror of it." I paused, trying to judge her reaction. I decided to go on. "What you said—that's exactly what the police said. 'Why didn't you leave? I would have.' But they wouldn't have. They didn't understand. They thought we were all crazy, wanted to hold us all for questioning, for observation. But I had—I had some money from my family, and I bribed the right people, and by the time they started their investigation I was half a world away." Her expression—interest, polite concern—hadn't changed. "I trust you won't repeat any of this to anyone, not even Dav. I wish you hadn't told Dav where I'm from."

"He won't say anything," she said. "And I won't either. I appreciate your telling me all this."

I nodded. I hadn't told her even half of the story.

23*14*05

Wandered around the city again today. Felt better after my talk with Esseri—it's good to talk about these things to another person, to get them out in the open. And now the city looks better to me—crowded, of course, and far too hot, but with a certain charm. Low flat stone houses of pink or blue, or grown houses wreathed in flowers of blue, white, yellow, facing wide crowded plazas where the people stand and gossip or argue, shouting and gesturing, for what seems like hours.

There are hundreds—thousands—of people, with immaculately white turbans that bob up and down the streets and plazas like a flock of birds. They are incredibly warm, open. Even with my limited Chuq I got into a few conversations, and one man wanted to argue politics with me—nothing personal, arguing politics seems to be everyone's hobby

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here, like gill-swimming on Lossara. The big holiday a few days ago had something to do with the political situation, but I'm not sure what. The man was very disappointed when I told him I didn't know what a Burrower (I think he said) was.

Wondering if I should stay here or move on. I used to be an opto-geneticist, though that was so long ago it seems to have happened to another person, a distant cousin. I don't think this world has that level of technology—at least I haven't seen any strikingly vivid iris colors, or the cat's-eye pupil that was starting to be popular when I left Lossara—but maybe I can find work in a related field. We'll see.

23*14*06

I was wrong. It does no good to open up, to discuss the past, especially if the past is strange, impossible to believe, hidden by the mists and rainbows of Lossara.

After today's lesson Esseri and I went down to the hotel bar and she began to ask me (always polite, never offensive) questions about the master. We started in Chuq, mine still halting and uncertain, then quickly switched to Sostha as the bar began to fill up. Neither of us commented on the change.

"What made you decide to follow the master in the first place?" she asked.

"I don't really know," I said. "I saw him on the news, one of his healings, and after that I couldn't think of anything else. I couldn't get him out of my mind. I was an opto-geneticist, and suddenly my job seemed useless, meaningless, compared to the kind of thing the master could do. Giving rich people's babies exotic eyes, compared to healing whole lives. And my marriage—it wasn't unhappy, but it was boring. My wife and I had run out of things to do together. I had a lot of money, but I didn't know what to do with it. I was looking for something. . . . And when he showed me that—that magic was possible, I knew I had found it."

She watched me over her glass. Encouraged, I finished my drink and went on. "So I talked to my wife about it. She hated the idea. To give up our lives, give up everything and join the master, live in that ugly compound a continent away. . . . But I kept at her, and finally I talked her into it, or wore her down, I don't know which. She told her friends we were going to Arquant, the sea-resort near the master's city, and no one made the connection. I sold my practice—I was that certain we'd be accepted.

"Do you know how the master picks his disciples?" Her expression was unreadable. "We all crowded into a room—there must have been a hundred of us, in a room meant for half that—and he pointed. It looked like he was pointing at random. 'You, and you, and you.' And all those

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people got on stage with him, and the rest of us got more and more desperate—you could smell the sweat—and finally he chose me and my wife. We'd both heard of cases where he split up couples married for years, so my wife was very glad to be chosen. And me—it was as if I'd ascended bodily into heaven. I was ecstatic.

"We went to the master's compound, and we lived there. You get up at six in the morning, and you work till evening, and in the evening there's the study groups. And once a week—"

"Why did you have to work that hard?" she said. "I mean, if the master could do anything, why didn't he do the work for you? And what about machines? No one works that hard."

"We didn't think of it that way," I said. "We did the work because it was for the master. We were glad to do it. No doubt the master had his reasons for giving us the work to do—that's what we thought, anyway. Sometimes he'd come by while we were scrubbing the toilets or making breakfast, and we felt as if the sun shone just for us. And once a week we went to the meeting hall and he'd speak to us. Sometimes he'd do a healing, or some kind of miracle, like changing the color of the meeting hall, and we'd feel it was all worthwhile."

"What did he talk to you about?"

"You know, I can't remember," I said. "That wasn't the point of the meeting, anyway—the point was to see him do something. I guess it was the same sort of thing we talked about in the study groups—work hard and obey the master, that kind of thing."

"And what would happen?"

"What do you mean?"

"If you worked hard and obeyed the master," she said. "What would happen then? Would you become like the master? Would you go to heaven?"

I raised my drink but it was empty. I ordered another. "Nothing," I said. "Nothing would happen. He just told us to do it and we did it, that's all."

"I don't understand," she said.

"Look," I said. "I'll give you an example. After we'd been there awhile the master decided he wanted my wife. And we were both delighted that she'd been chosen, that she would get his personal attention. You see? Nothing he could do was wrong."

"You weren't jealous?"

"How could I be?" I said. My drink came and I took a long, cooling swallow. I'd lost count of the number of drinks we'd had. It didn't seem at all strange to me to be sitting there discussing with a near-stranger something I'd never talked about with anyone, not even my wife. "I couldn't compete with him—I couldn't even try. It wasn't just sex. He

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could fulfill her fantasies, things I couldn't even guess. He could turn his skin to fur, or hers to silk. Give her claws, scales, fins. They could become aliens, make love in the vacuum of space. He could change her anatomy, make her receptive all over her body. They could change sex—he could be the woman, and she the man." Suddenly I became aware of where I was, in the hotel bar discussing my wife's sexual fantasies with a woman I barely knew. "Well," I said. "I guess I've thought about it a lot."

"But you didn't mind?"

"Not then," I said. "After a while he got tired of her, went on to someone else, and she came back to me. We never had sex after that—actually we barely spoke to each other. But even now I can't say it bothers me. They're all gone, anyway—the master's gone, and my wife's still on Lossara. I'd like to forget it and start over again somewhere else."

We sat in silence for a while. I thought of the master, the compound, all of us hopping and twirling in our strange dance for an audience of one. A dance that lasted years. A strong desire arose within me for the old days, to be back with the master and his magic, to live in the compound again, if only in memory. I started talking to fill the void.

"I was the one who was there—at the end," I said. "It didn't get on the news-nets because I was long gone by the time they let the news people in. I had gone to see him about something, and no one answered the door at his office, and he wasn't anywhere in the compound, and finally his top people started to panic and forced the door open. And his office was empty. We didn't tell anyone for a long time, for the week before the meeting—we thought he'd be coming back any day. But rumors got around even before the meeting, and when we were all in the meeting hall and he wasn't there we had to tell them. That's when someone suggested that he was still on the compound, that he had taken someone else's shape. Well, if there was panic before you should have seen us after that. But there was only one murder, and then we called the police. Some of the news-nets said there were five or six deaths, but that was sensationalism."

"And you never found him?"

I shook my head. "I guess that was when I started to come to my senses," I said. "They call it that, anyway, but to me it felt like I was losing my senses, that things were becoming duller, less interesting, less magical. I never really rejected the master. I left the compound because I didn't want to talk to the police, and I left Lossara for the same reason. If the master appeared before me right now, if he asked me back and told me everything would be just the same as it was, I'd go. I'd hate myself, but I'd go. I wouldn't be able to help it."

"Where do you think he is?"

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"I don't know," I said. "Maybe he'll turn up on another planet."

"Why do you think he left?"

I tried to grin but I have no idea what my face looked like at that moment. "What do you think I think about every day? From the moment I wake up to the time I go to sleep? Why did he leave us? What did we do to offend him? What did we do wrong?"

She left shortly after that. I stayed and had a few more drinks, then staggered up to my room and fell asleep fully clothed. Some time during the night I woke and, because I couldn't get back to sleep, I began to write. I feel ashamed, soiled. Why did I tell her everything, why wasn't I able to guard my privacy, my memories of the master? I feel sick. I will never get drunk again, never, though drink is the closest thing I've found to the enchantment of the master. If I had the strength of will to leave Lossara despite my hope that the master would return—a strength my poor wife, who is probably still awaiting him, lacked—then I can stop drinking. I can.

23*14*16

My hands are still shaking as I write this, though it is nine days later and the danger, for now, is past. I woke the day after my drinking bout feeling, if anything, worse than the night before. I resolved to call Esseri, to drop her as a language teacher and to find someone else, someone who would not pry, however politely, someone who would not invite me down to the hotel bar after every lesson. She wasn't home. I left the hotel determined to find her at work, and after a few hours and wrong turns I managed to find the site where she and Dav were growing the house. They were sitting in the shade of a wall—much taller than it was a few days ago—and drinking.

"Hello, Esseri," I said in Sostha. "Can I talk to you a minute?"

She finished her drink. "Sure," she said. She said something to Dav and came over to me. "What do you want?"

"I'm going to find another language teacher," I said. Now that it had come to it I was strangely reluctant. "I'll pay you for your lessons now."

She stood motionless a moment. I thought she wanted to ask me why, but she said nothing. Then she— Well, she didn't do anything. I wish I could say that she disappeared, or turned into someone else, or changed the weather. She did none of that, but I knew her anyway. Something in the way she stood, the way she looked at me . . . "You're the master!" I said. I heard the terror in my voice. Dav heard it, too, and looked up.

She backed away and shook her head. But every one of her gestures made me more convinced. "Yes," I said, almost savagely. Something opened within me I thought I had sealed away forever. "Yes, you are. Admit it."

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She seemed to sag then, to become smaller. "All right," she said. "All right. You're smarter than I gave you credit for."

If the master appeared before me, I had said. I had said it to her. I wanted to run, to take another ship, and another, as many as I had to to widen the distance between her and me. But I couldn't. Did she hold me? Or was I seduced as before, by the magic? I only know I stood there watching her, and one of the strongest emotions I felt was joy, joy that she had noticed me, had singled me out.

"Why?" I said. "Why did you follow me?"

She laughed, not the master's terrible laugh I remembered but a sound almost of despair. I thought of some of the things I had said to her about the master and my fear returned. Would she kill me now? "So now you think I followed you," she said. "I was on this planet before you were. I saw your message in the net and recognized you, that's all. I thought it might be—amusing—to answer you. I was curious to hear what you had to say."

"And then you made me talk about what happened on Lossara," I said. "About my wife, and the compound . . . did you think that was amusing, too?"

"I didn't make you do anything," she said. "I haven't done any magic except keep this body since I got here. You did it yourself. You were lonely, you wanted to talk to someone, and it happened to be me."

"How the hell would you know if you've done any magic or not?" I said. "You have no idea what it's like to be a normal human being. You probably do it without thinking."

She said nothing. I couldn't believe my audacity in arguing with her, with him, with the person I had most loved and hated in my life. Nothing could keep me from asking the question I most wanted to ask. "Why?" I said. "Why did you leave us? What happened?"

For a long while I thought she wasn't going to answer. She looked younger, very vulnerable. Finally she said, "You said it. You said I don't know what it's like to be a normal human being. All my life I've been able to do what I want, and when I discovered the extent of my powers I became the master. I didn't want to be. People began to follow me, to ask to be my disciples. I healed a few people, because I thought that was what was expected of me. And then I maimed a few, like you said, because—because I could. No one stopped me—no one wanted to stop me. I didn't know what I wanted, so I took everything. Sex, obedience, money, anything anyone wanted to give me. But none of it was what I wanted, or was something I wanted only until the desire was fulfilled. I was unhappy. Most of the time in the compound, I was unhappy."

I was appalled. I felt as though the ground beneath me had given way and I was plummeting without any hope of coming to firm earth again.

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That the master hadn't known what he wanted, that we were not his happy workers doing his bidding but parts of an experiment that hadn't worked out . . . I even think I stumbled, that she put out a hand to steady me, though I'm almost sure I would have remembered her touch. "And now?" I said. I was whispering. "Do you know what you want now?"

"No," she said. She laughed again. "I thought I wanted to be just like everyone else, to be normal. I thought I wanted to be a housegrower—it seemed an honorable profession, growing things, and providing shelter. But there's something missing here, too. I could fill the planet with houses in less time than it takes to grow one. And I drink too much, because when I drink I can remember—remember what I was, or the way I would have liked it to have been. I'll probably stay here until I can think of what I want to do next, though. I don't really want to cause any more misery. Listening to your story I realized—well, I realized just how unhappy I made everyone. And there's something satisfying about working with your hands, about planting things . . ."

I said the next words before I knew I was going to say them. "Let me work with you," I said. "I can plant houses with you."

"No," she said. This time I could almost swear she grew physically smaller. "You don't know what you're saying. You were right about me—I don't know what it's like to be normal. There's something about me that makes people want to follow me, to do my bidding. I can't stop them—I don't know how. Dav feels it, too. You heard him—he would have followed me if he'd been on Lossara. I've grown to hate this power. I don't want people to follow me. I want them to live their own lives and leave me alone. It's not me you want to follow but this thing, whatever it is. If I could give it up, I would."

"Please," I said.

"No," she said. She sounded as if she were the one begging.

"I'll show up here every day," I said. "You can't stop me. I'll plant and water and weed for you. I'll do everything you don't want to do. You won't even have to pay me."

"No," she said. "No, go away. Leave me alone."

"You answered my message," I said. "You must want me for something."

She turned and walked away from me. I saw Dav look up as she came toward him, saw him smile widely, and I felt jealousy twist deep inside me. I remembered all the rot I had written about my strength of will and I would have laughed if I could. I had no more strength of will now then I had last year, working at the compound. It was only the fact that she told me to leave that allowed me to go, to take a ship to another planet, another fresh start.

If she follows me to this planet I'll resist her. This time I'll resist her. ●

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As most of you probably know by now, multiple Hugo-and-Nebula winning author James Tiptree, Jr., was actually the pseudonym of Dr. Alice Sheldon, a semi-retired experimental psychologist who also wrote occasionally under the name of Raccoona Sheldon. Alice's tragic death in 1987 put an end to "both" authors' careers; the story you are about to read may well be the last "new" piece by this brilliant author that you will ever get to read. It was found among her papers after her death, and purchased posthumously, after an exchange of correspondence with Alice's agent and her literary executor. The story had originally been written under the byline of "Raccoona Sheldon" more than a decade ago, and, as far as we know, was never submitted anywhere—perhaps Alice felt that in its uninhibited, playful sensuality, it was too "risqué" for the magazine market of its time. We feel that it represents this unique author at the top of her form, and we are proud to bring this lost, last story of Alice's to the light of day at last.

THE EARTH DOTH LIKE A SNAKE RENEW

by James Tiptree, Jr.

art: J.K. Potter

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Looking back—insofar as the dead can look back—it is difficult to discover how P. came to believe that the Earth was male.

We see her first as a solitary child with the habit of taking off her clothes in the woods. The woods belonged to her family, and from her first summer P. understood that this forest was magical, which is to say, real. The city, she knew, was not real. Too many buried pipes and wires, perhaps; certainly too many people. To P., her winters in the city *did not count.*

What counted were her months of wandering alone through the extravagantly senile forest, of lying bare on mulm, roots, rocks, and mosses, in silent rapport with a deep Presence which she identified unquestioningly as male.

How did she define maleness, this female baby? Well, she knew it was something different from father, Oh yes! She felt . . . she felt in contact with a huge hardness to which she belonged in an unchildlike way, and which had some unspecified, slow, enormous *intention* toward her.

If she had told her family, her learned uncle would have dismissed it as garble—the myth of Antaeus, say, or Atlas, which he had told her. Her fat uncle and her genius uncle would have blamed it on her infant glands. A masculine Earth? Her beautiful mother would have gurgled like the nightingale; she had wild talents and knew that Earth was a ball of rock inhabited by (a) baboons and (b) English literature.

Only P.'s father might have glanced up from his labor of keeping the whole dotty family afloat and said H'mm? He was a thin Pict with lavender eyes which still remembered Viking massacres. In fact he was in a small way to blame for P.'s problem.

One day when P. was ten he had a laughing fit, and invited her to view the stand of *Mutinus caninus* behind the garage. This was a ferny place which P. usually avoided because she knew it was the unofficial gents' pissoir.

Her father pointed; P. stared. Bursting from the moss in front of her nose were twenty startling pink naked dogs' pizzles. They were very lifelike; the smallest might belong to a Yorkshire, the largest to a Dalmatian. Each rosy glans was capped with an ochre ooze, visibly succeeding in its aim of attracting blue-bottles.

"They come up every year." Her father shook his head. "Aren't they awful? It's a mushroom. I never told your mother."

P. was silent before this evocation from the ancient loam. From that day the Earth to her was explicitly HE.

Surprisingly, P. was already familiar—indeed, given her family, overfamiliar—with the mythos of female Earth. She had been told that Greek and Druid and Goth viewed Earth as SHE, as Gaea or Freya—a female body to be ploughed, sowed, "husbanded" by man. She learned

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that assorted aborigines believed this, too, and even the immense Chinese bloc held firmly that the Earth was female: dark, moist, passive, Yin. The dry harps of science confirmed it: Earth was clearly Terra Mater, the womb from which had teemed proteins and pterodactyls, gerbils, generals, herself, and the Green Bay Packers.

All this never troubled P. To her, these people were talking of another planet. Their "earth" might be female or a cuckoo clock, what did it matter? THE EARTH, her Earth, was male. Every cell of her small body knew it. She lived on and was carried through stellar space by a being who was a functional male. And she also knew that however that function might come to define itself, its name would be Love.

The fact of love between herself and HIM, the Earth, was so deep that she held it in perfect silence, as a fish holds its convictions about water.

Function, as always, following form, there came a summer when P. was suddenly grown large and bemused by glowings in the crotch. She invited Hadley Morton to her woods.

Hadley had attracted her attention during the unreal winter at school by happy grapplings at her erogenous zones. He would, she felt, be a suitable initiator and the forest a suitable site. And Hadley proved a wise choice. In public he was fresh-faced and polite, in private unstintingly erectile. By the third week they had managed to consecrate not only her own woods but several acres of the adjoining Northlands National Park.

It was then that the first real event of P.'s life took place.

They had whiled the afternoon away on top of a large boulder which a glacier had abandoned by a nameless lake. This rock had been a special sacred refuge of P.'s childhood. Now she sat up stuporously, feeling Hadley drying on her legs, and looked out over the golden reeds to see if events had worked changes in the view.

As she looked, summer visibly ended. Green floodlights died among the frowsy trees and the first high strobe of autumn flared. A squirrel stopped eating a pinecone and decided to bury it. The heart of the air developed an icicle; an invisible arrow from the North crossed the sky, leaving it a wilder blue—a crow shouted—and it was Fall.

Seeing this P. felt a misgiving, rather like the moment before she had discovered all her credit cards were lost. She looked down. Hadley was dozing in the fern chaff, his blameless torso molten in the sun, his kneecaps somewhat abraded.

"Go home, Hadley," she said involuntarily.

"Uh?"

"I said, we should go. It's getting late."

Always agreeable, he retrieved his Finnish hiking shorts and they clambered down and set off along the soft deer trails. P. felt unreasonably,

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increasingly frantic to be rid of him, but there was no way. She ran ahead, trying to sense whatever might be unfolding around them. Hadley plodded amiably up, whistling "Greensleeves." P. decided to walk behind, watching to left, right, above, beyond. A partridge covey froze by their feet. "Neat," said Hadley. At the marsh two does stared unnaturally. "That's you," Hadley said, "except you have a better ass." P. felt a touch of fear.

Presently they came to a dark shore held by old climax hemlocks who had slowly, slowly outlived the bright succession now rotting underfoot. Among the dim aisles P. saw a strange pale spear. She darted to it.

Hadley turned back to find her holding a huge, white, erect, human phallus, veined and lipped with perfect fidelity. It was as long as her forearm and ended in a single large wrinkled testis.

"How did that get here?" Hadley frowned about for some feral sexware merchant.

"It's a mushroom," P. muttered unwillingly. "A something *impudicus*. I never knew they got so big."

Hadley poked at it in disbelief.

"Look out, it's very old. The gunk is all washed off."

It was indeed a ghost's glove; frail, almost transparent.

"The common Stinkhorn. There's other kinds." P. tried to laugh, setting it back upright in the mold, and they went on. But not as before.

She knew now. Sadness. Reproach in that spectral erection of the Earth. Its mournful pallor told her she had committed betrayal. More had been expected of her, intended for her, here in HIS sacred grove. To bring a Hadley here was impermissible.

Mortification blurred her eyes as she followed Hadley's well-filled shorts. But underneath, excitement welled. HE had spoken! HE had sent her the first sign of love!

Hadley must go—and to her relief Hadley was already telling her that he must leave in the morning. The encounter with the appalling fungus might have touched him too, she thought; like the junior baboon who senses a senior eye fixed on him from beneath a brow-ridge and departs.

As soon as the throb of his peach Corvette faded, P. ran back to the hemlock grove. The *Phalloides* was gone. She stripped and fell prone on the dark loam, sending a wave of feeling downward to HIM. Nothing responded. The deeps below her were mute. P. sighed; she had learned that the offended male was often silent. But why had HIS reproach been so delayed? Why had HE not warned her before, rather than after such an amplitude of Hadley? No answer. Well, the male (she also knew) was often a bit slow. Or perhaps HE had other matters to attend to?

This thought humbled her; she began for the first time in her life seriously to think. What she thought on then—and for most of her short

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life—was a simple question. Like the Indian who loved the mermaid she asked herself: How?

How? How would HE come to her? How should she offer herself to HIM?

That HE—the Earth—would claim her physically she never doubted. She also took it for granted, being barely sixteen, that HIS love would be supremely satisfying, spiced with just a bit of thrilling discomfort. Caresses, penetration, climax—a divinely amplified Hadley filled her young dreams. Her faith was perfect; she did not for a moment consider being, say, penetrated by stalagmites or caressed by an avalanche. No, HE would be incarnated, like Zeus mounting Europa. Or perhaps Danae's shower of gold? P. frowned; the gold seemed an unsatisfying method. Surely HE would do better. But how? And when and where?

So began the first stage of P.'s quest, the naive invitation of Earth to her nubile female parts.

But what of the long winter months when she lived in urban schools encapsulated by humanity? Oddly enough, these interruptions of real life did not annoy her. They were merely long dreams; P. hibernated in herself, amused to learn the names of French kings or the rites of triangles. She was not aware that she had grown quite beautiful, and she was only vaguely aware that she was also growing very rich, from a persistent mortality among her monied relatives. When all this made her the focus of erotic strivings, she responded with her usual, dreamy largesse. She felt quite unsupervised by her destiny in these trivial human scenes, and the educational effect might be beneficial.

Her human lovers were sometimes disconcerted by one of P.'s rare fits of sexual intensity—which faded in a night. How could they know that she had fancied HIS aura in a pair of muscular thighs or a surly peasant profile? A girl of lesser means might have been called schizzy; at her increasing income-level she came only to be known as delightfully absentminded. This diagnosis was confirmed when a yacht bearing all her mother's real-estate cousins went down in the Bahamas leaving no other heirs.

But the summers—ah, the summers of real life, when she roved in her solitary quest for HIM! Where would HE come to her? Here? Here? She lay naked and half-mesmerized in leafy deer's nests; she sprawled dreaming in sun-warm bracken; she even curled up in something's rather smelly cave. Once she lay shivering in the blue moonlight of an early snow. *Love, come to me, come to me,* she called in silence, sending out her young pheromones like the urgent moth.

And things happened—almost. As she was dozing on a log in the sunny shallows of a lake, feeling the bluegill fry nibble her lax legs, a shadow fell. She dared not open her eyes; unbearably excited, she felt vast hands

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taking form upon her. And then—hard haunches seemed to be parting her own. Aching with welcome she arched, everted—and just as the Presence broached her—she fell off the log.

When she had the water out of her eyes there was only a swaying of the alders where something huge and golden might have vanished.

Another day, lying prone on the rock once profaned by Hadley, she heard again the sky-crack from the North and in the same instant the rock beneath her came alive. A warm current invaded her, a vast life thrumming toward her loins. She opened to it, forcing her body onto the stony hardness, feeling Something rise, radiant—only to sink back to nothing, leaving her half-coming and alone.

Disappointments, but they only confirmed P.'s faith. And her quest for HIM began to cover a wider area as her schooling escalated through ever more expensive locales. She had high hopes of a narcissus field in the French Alps, she vibrated to HIS nearness on an Aegean isle. She was almost sure of HIM all one afternoon in the Marquesas and took a terrible sunburn.

But it was all to no avail, and with each vacation she grew more desperate, more daring in her offering. *Oh Love, where are you?* her body pleaded, feeling HIM around, beneath—everywhere but where she was most needful. *Are you HE? Is it YOU at last?* her soul cried to assorted rural vagrants, who couldn't believe their luck. Toward the end of this phase her experiments included an unwilling flautist with a crippled foot and a small Shetland horse. There was also the exhausting episode with the Merino ram.

Such extremes (she afterward realized) signaled the end of this phase. Maturity was swelling within her girlish chrysalis; she was ready for a new stage.

But first an interlude. It began with tragedy: her beautiful mother boarded an Aeronaves jet which took off straight into the crags of Popocatépetl. At the funeral P. was shocked to see her father's grief. Her uncles too seemed to have aged. She returned sadly to her off-campus apartment in Bronxville and perceived that she was coming down with the flu.

Opening a pill bottle, she thought of her mother's quaint belief that Earth was a lifeless ball of rocks, and wept anew. Fragments of the organized gossip which she had been taught under the rubric of Psychology drifted through her mind. Suddenly she froze. The pills showered to the floor.

What if her mother was right?

P.'s mouth fell open in a horrified gape. All her life she had believed, had loved without question this supernal being: HE. The very Earth.

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Suddenly, for the first time, the doubt raked her. Was it possible she was crazy? Did some term like projective delusion apply to her?

Stunned, she sank upon the commode, recalling how her fat uncle had explained and explained that Earth was dead matter, governed by various laws of motion and inertia. At the time she had smiled unheeding. Now the fearful possibility struck her. Could the foundation of her life be wrong? Was Earth really only a dead rock on which she, a biological mite, was projecting her hallucinations?

All night she wrestled, weeping, with the nightmare, gulping ampicillin as her fever rose. With every sneeze the desolating idea appeared more probable. The Earth—her lover? Surely she was insane. How could she have been such a fool?

By next morning she was convinced that it was her duty to dismantle the reality-structure of her life, even though it killed her. *The Earth is not alive,* she told herself drearily with her head in a vaporizer. *He does not exist.* Dozing in antibiotic hazes she repeated it: *The Earth is not alive. I must unbelieve it all.*

As she opened the second box of Kleenex she discovered that the effort was becoming easier, was becoming, in fact, almost amusing. *The Earth is not alive,* she sniveled, aware as she did so of a vast I AM lurking beneath her, palpable even through the noisy world of man. *The Earth is not alive*—What a willful joke, to disregard HIM thus! *The Earth is not*—why, it was like the week when she had tried to believe in Berkleian solipsism, jerking open her closet door to catch her skis in the act of reappearing. *The Earth . . .*

With the last broad-spectrum spansule this new fantasy of an inanimate Earth had taken its place among such curiosa as the doctrine of the perfection of virginity (or was it the other way round?) in which a Jesuit lover had once attempted to instruct her. With the first cup of chicken broth all doubt had evaporated forever. She rose from her couch feeling profoundly refreshed and afterward thought of that weekend as the time when she had thoroughly probed alternative viewpoints and found them wanting.

But the experience had changed her. When her mother's junk jewelry turned out to contain several hundred carats of cabochon-cut emeralds, P. understood. HE was providing for her. HE had in fact been taking care of her all along. All those regrettable deaths—she saw now how strange they were. Mysterious wrecks, natural disasters: HIS handiwork! How ruthless! she quivered. (But how kind!) She began for the first time to realize the true enormity of HIS being, vis-à-vis herself. How absurd she had been, to imagine that this supreme male principle could be incarnated in some puny human body! Not to mention a Merino ram—she

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squirmed and blushed hotly, causing the junior partner of the law firm she was then entering to lose his train of thought.

P. continued on into the office of the senior partner, who had summoned her to hear another will. She greeted him absently and sat by the window, her mind far away. I am now nineteen: *I am a woman,* she told herself. *No longer a mere girl.* The thought excited her. A woman's love was different; girls merely fucked, while women did—she was not quite sure what, but something more complex, profound. She gazed out over the grey corrosive waters of Lake Michigan while the lawyer droned on about some dull tract in Montana on which an unknown cousin had perished. A suspicion came to her.

Maybe, up to now HE had been playing with her! Patronizing her with tweaks and throbbings like a baby! She flushed again, realizing how ludicrous her idea of love had been. Well, now she had grown up. But how could she show HIM? How could she make HIM take her seriously?

Her eye fell on a Sierra Club brochure, wandered to the smog and the dead waters outside—and inspiration came.

P. knew, of course, of the shocking destruction of the environment at the hands of man. She had read dutifully of the forests raped, the animals slaughtered, the mountains gutted, the oceans and air befouled. But to her—in her by now very special tax bracket—these were abstract wrongs. Because she didn't see it; her money carried her to the remote unspoiled enclaves of the rich. As to her own sacred forest, her father had long since bought the lumber company which was pulping the surrounding Northwoods Park.

Now P. realized she had been blind.

While she had been mooning, HIS body was being poisoned, devastated, destroyed! HE was in danger, was perhaps even suffering, and she had not understood. How terribly childish of her, how callous! What should she do?

She turned to the elderly lawyer and saw, like a light above his head, her answer. Her duty—her mission as a true woman—was to stop the destruction! She would save Earth!

"Yes!" she breathed aloud.

The lawyer looked up irritably. "I have not finished."

P. sighed and turned back to the lake. Suddenly to her delight she perceived that a rainbow was forming itself above the leaden waters. HE had heard her, HE approved! How beautiful!

Patiently she waited while the lawyer mumbled through an incomprehensible list of assets and investments he was supervising. She listened only enough to assure herself that there was indeed a great deal of money; hundreds of millions, it appeared. Good. When he had finished she turned on him a gaze of great beauty and exaltation.

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"Mr. Finch, I want to use all that to save Earth from pollution. I want to start right now, this minute. Do you have someone who knows what all these organizations—" she tapped the Sierra Club bulletin "—*do?* Which one is best to give money to?"

"Ah, ah—ah—" said Mr. Finch and slumped clutching his chest.

After a short delay a junior partner was produced. And P. set forth upon her new stage: The Crusade.

Now it would be well to pause for a look at P.'s bodily aspect as she entered upon the ecological scene, credit-case in hand and lawyer at elbow.

The general effect was quiet, slender and expensive. Her voice was soft and she swathed herself in natural monotones of smoke or honey, snow or willow or heath. The public eye tended to pass over her, troubled only by an obscure feeling that its zippers were showing. The male eye that roved back discovered the elegant outrage of her haunches, the slim dove's breast. Moving upward the eye encountered a sorcerer's smile (from her mother) and her father's clear lilac gaze. If the eye lingered too long it received a lethal communication of something like lascivious virginity. After which other women acquired a distressing resemblance to drum majorettes.

Her lovers called her various kinds of goddess, angel, and so on. Hadley Morton had said she looked like a doe, and remarked on her ass. It was widely agreed she was an *incredible* piece of ass. But lazy.

This then was the luxurious young person who, several months later, emerged from the office suite of the Club de Rome, followed by the junior partner, whose name was Reinhold. Reinhold closed the door upon a chorus of distinguished farewells and signaled the chauffeur.

"To the airport." He handed her in and leaned back. He was tired.

"Reinhold," P. said thoughtfully, "how many organizations does that make now?"

"Forty-two," said Reinhold promptly in his clear Chicago-Anglo accent. "Not counting sixteen ad hocs, a couple of letterheads and the Madagascar lemur woman."

"I thought it would be simpler. There're so many different terrible menaces."

"Simple chemotoxins and assorted direct poisons," he ticked it off on his fingers. "Potentiation effects, mechanical destruction plus erosion, radioactives, mutagenesis. Animals die, fish die, birds die, insects perish, no pollination—famine. Or, plankton is killed, oceans die—famine. Or, CO_2 greenhouse effect, oceans rise—drowning and famine. Or, smog cuts off solar radiation, glaciation starts—freezing and famine. Or, all freshwater lakes eutrophic, anaerobic poisons—death from thirst. Or, soil bacteria wiped out—nothing to eat. Or food doesn't give out, pop runaway,

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pathological overcrowding—worldwide Bangladesh. Or, energy shortages—war and famine. I forgot viral plagues. Et cetera et cetera et cetera et cetera. Let's see—estimated time to destruction of biosphere or other point of irreversible damage, five years min to a hundred years max, discounting chance of nuclear holocaust—"

He wondered as he spoke whether this time she would remember fucking him.

"Terrible, terrible," P. murmured. "It's all so much worse than I thought." She sighed, thinking of all the doomed birds and animals, Earth's bright familiars. HIS works of art. It must hurt HIM so.

"It doesn't affect you personally, dear," Reinhold said earnestly. "Why don't you build an ecodome? Hell, with your resources, you could build an orbital satellite."

"But I want to use my resources to help *Earth,*" she repeated for the hundredth time. Reinhold clenched his jaw, hoping that Finch, Farbsberry, Koot, and Trickle would understand what he was up against. Their biggest investment bloc.

"How, dear?" he said lightly. "A billion uterine loops? Free vasectomies? CNS implants? Nuclear fusion research? Even your money can't change five billion minds. Or buy all the governments."

"It's so *complicated,*" she hugged her shoulders sensuously, gazing at him with lilac pools of sorrow. "Reinhold . . . you know what I think?"

"What, darling?" He contemplated throwing himself on her and crossed his legs.

"Even if I could do it all, do everything . . . I don't think it would work."

He was delighted.

"They all *know* so much more than I do. I'm terribly ignorant, I know that now. But I have this feeling. It just wouldn't work. Something would go wrong. And, Reinhold—"

"Yes, dear?"

"Reinhold, all those *men.* They're so good. So sensitive and kind. And yet, Reinhold, I couldn't help thinking . . . *they're* really doing it. *Men,* I mean. Not women. Women just seem to scratch around and braid string or something . . . "

"Oh for Christ's sake. *You're* a woman, you're riding in four hundred horsepower, you're going to burn fossil fuel all across the Atlantic. Have you any idea what your gross energy consumption is? That little pair of metal-mesh slippers—"

"I know, Reinhold," she said sorrowfully. "I *do* know. But that's because it's there. Men put it all there for us. If women were alone, do you think they would do strip-mining or ocean drilling or General Motors? Or kill whales?"

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"We're to be replaced by a sperm bank, is that it?" He grinned. "Speaking of that—"

"You know what I like best?" she asked shyly.

"What?"

"I liked . . . that little man with the secret army of antipollution saboteurs."

Reinhold chuckled nervously, hoping she wasn't serious. With P. you never could tell.

But she had covered her face with her pale gloved hands and was whispering heartbrokenly, "Oh it's all so hopeless, so *hopeless*—"

"Dearest! Don't cry, sweetheart, here—come to Reinhold."

She burrowed in his lapel, sobbing. "There's no *way,* what can I do? Oh, oh, oh, I've failed HIM."

"I'm taking you home right now, dear. Listen to Reinhold. That Stockholm thing is just more talking heads, they'll only upset you."

" . . . Yes."

But on the plane she acted really quite strange, and later in the New York VIP suite she pulled away in the middle of his program.

"Reinhold, is there any way I could start a world war *now?*"

He tried to swear and laugh at once. Then he saw her face. Oh, no.

"I mean, if people all killed themselves off right now fast, wouldn't most of the environment be saved?"

"Ah, well, but—"

She jumped up and paced naked to the window. Maddeningly, he saw she had again forgotten his existence.

"If I could get some bombs . . . But it's so difficult, isn't it? It would be so hard. I'm so small. Oh, I can't do *anything.* Oh-h-h-h . . . "

He ground his beautiful midwestern teeth. There she stood, God only knew how many millions and the greatest piece of ass he'd met in years. And the mind of an amnesic budgerigar. If she did agree to marry him she'd probably forget that too. If he switched her pills, she couldn't forget she was pregnant. Or could she?

P. turned on him, a figure of woeful voluptuousness.

"I'm so miserable, Reinhold. How can I ever help HIM? I can't, I've failed. I've failed. Oh, I have to think. Hadley, please go away."

When finally she was alone her pain would not let her rest. She paced, flung herself down, got up to pace again without noticing the passing night or day, the ringing phone. HE is sick, poisoned, dying, she thought over and over, and I have failed HIM. I'm no good.

She could not even feel HIS presence, here in this mad human heap. She longed for HIM; never before had she spent a whole summer among people, away from all communion. She felt terribly disoriented. When the phone rang again under her hand she picked it up without thinking.

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"I thought you should know," Reinhold said formally, "your uncle Robert Endicott passed away last night. Some sort of food poisoning, truffles I believe. I'm extremely sorry."

"Oh, poor Uncle Robbie," she cried distractedly. "He was so fat. Oh dear."

"Yes, tragic. By the way, something else just came up; it might take your mind off everything. You remember that tract out in west Montana? Your lessee just called, he's peed off because his artesian wells all blew out. It seems they're shooting out a fairly high grade of crude oil. We're sending Marvin. Listen, will you marry me now, darling? You have to have someone to take care of you, you can't—"

She hung up, frowning. Oil? *OIL?* HE had sent her another gift, she understood that (poor Uncle Robbie!), but why *oil?* Oil, the poison of poisons, the cause of so much pollution and death?

She paced, chewing her hair. It was wonderful that HE still loved her, was even rewarding her feeble efforts. But why more oil? Didn't HE understand what was killing HIM? Impossible. Was this some kind of reckless gallant gesture? Or was HE trying to tell her something?

She gazed out at the jeweled city crusting through the murky dawn and enlightenment suddenly came to her. It was not HIS life that was threatened. Not at all. It was hers.

The biosphere—all those endless ecologists had told her how thin it was, how fragile. A mere film of air and water and soil and life on a huge mineral body. HIS body, what, several *thousand miles* in diameter? Why, life was just a stain on it, a kind of mildew born of sunlight on HIS outer hide! How could it mean anything to HIM? Perhaps HE scarcely noticed it, perhaps it even annoyed him, like—like acne! Was it possible that HE even wanted to get rid of all this rich biology she had tried so hard to save?

At this moment the sunrise actually burst through the smog and gilded the city spires. That told her: she was right. Her ridiculous crusade was over.

But what then should she do to be worthy of HIM? To show HIM she was a woman, no longer a silly girl?

Well, she thought hesitantly, women *know* things. Real women are distinguished by deep understanding, especially of their mates. What did she know about HIM? Almost nothing—she had found that out in her travels. Her state of knowledge was contemptible.

She must learn.

Pausing only to instruct Reinhold to send a large sum to the antipollution guerrilla, P. rushed to the New York Public Library. Shortly afterward she emerged with an armful of course catalogs and syllabi, and boarded the jet for Berkeley.

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On the flight she made out a list:

Geology, Physical.

Geology, Structural; also called Tectonics.

Geophysics, including Seismics, Core Plasmas, and Geomagnetism.

Oceanography, maybe.

That took care of HIS body—ah, my beloved—and its history. There remained also Economic Geology and Mineral Sensorotics, which she dismissed as disgusting. But the list did not seem complete. A real woman should understand her lover's outside interests and relate intelligently to HIS life. And there was also the boring matter of HIS relatives, she owed HIM that courtesy. Consulting further, she added:

Astronomy I. The Solar System.

Astronomy V. The Local Cluster, Origin and Future. Prereq., Calculus III. (Oh God. Give me strength.)

She felt satisfied now. As she debarked from the plane her feeling was confirmed; the airport was jolted by the worst fault slippage in five years. She knew she was on the right track at last!

At the university began what she thought of as her period of Womanly Preparation. (Several science instructors were to see it rather differently.) It was a time of hard labor and delight.

Discoveries! HIS skin, she learned, was much like her own, always sloughing away, upwelling, smoothing out. Horsts, grabens, klippens, and other details of orogeny did not interest her much, and "bedding planes" were a disappointment. But the richness of HIS substances themselves! Where before she had thought of HIS life as only soft forests, meadows, flowers, she now thrilled to the reality of mineral magic. To think, over 2,000 kinds!

Lovingly her hands held sphlerites and amphiboles. Marveling she counted the cleavages and complex symmetries of crystal beauty. Orthorhombic, triclinic! She learned the fascinating sequences of temperature selection from cooling zeolites to burning feldspars and olivine. The radioactive ores thrilled her—HIS pulse ticked there. And oh, the magic of X-ray diffraction patterns!

Ordinary gravel became no longer dull but the powder of HIS person. Her feet became sensitized, sexualized to HIS substance; she fell asleep murmuring of HIS states and processes: sedimentary . . . metamorphic . . . igneous . . .

Progressing from granite to diorite to gabbro to the deep, the primal basalts, she felt herself moving closer to HIS mysteries. Laccoliths and lopoliths, she whispered; stocks and —ah!—dark plutons! All forms of igneous intrusion, these. Igneous intrusion? It was all her desire!

And grandest of all were the incomprehensibly vast magmatic bulges known as batholiths. She passed her first Thanksgiving holiday roaming

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alone upon the gloomiest rocks of the great Idaho Batholith, dreaming in the nearness of HIS primal might.

Now here it is well to clarify P.'s concept of the nature of her lover, Earth. She did not then—or ever—think of HIM as an oblate spheroid 7,926.68 miles in equatorial diameter, massing 22×10^{20} tons and bearing at the center a pressure of 25,000 tons-per-inch. HE had these attributes and all the others of which she had recently learned, just as she had her attributes of mass and osmotic pressure. But they did not *define* HIM—any more than she was definable as a 24-volt potential-pattern in 1300 ccs of electro-chemical jelly.

Exactly what HE really was she found no need to say. If pressed she might (with her new vocabulary) have murmured something about "mega-energy configurations" or perhaps "gravito-inertial structurance." But the truth was that HE was simply HE, as she was HIS. The rest was detail. To her final hour there dwelt behind her mind the immense dark figure of a sleeping man outlined in unsleeping fire.

She now returned to campus almost unbearably excited by the subject of vulcanism. And since the bank kept converting Uncle Robbie's early Polaroid, she invited her whole geology class on an Easter charter flight to the live volcano of Iceland.

So it was that her instructor and forty fellow students presently found themselves carrying a champagne lunch up the slope of a coastal caldera near Surtsey. This particular volcano had subsided into a small inner vent and was regarded as quite safe. Beyond the caldera wall lay a plain of tuffs and pumice; P. ran eagerly out upon it in her handmade Loslis. Small fumaroles spouted to life as she passed; she smiled fondly. Her companions hung back. Trembling with excitement, P. advanced alone to the lip of the live crater and leaned over to look.

Below her bubbled HIS molten essence! Flowing fire, laced with strange crusts: Was this perhaps HIS blood leaking from cosmic scars? Or perhaps—a more significant emission?

She stared entranced, feeling only the slightest impulse to fling herself within. (The time, she somehow knew, was not yet.)

Gouts of flame burst up, warming her face. *Oh, love!* P. gazed on, delighted.

Suddenly she was seized from behind and forcibly carried at a bumpy trot across the plain. It was Doctor Ivvins, her instructor.

"Stop! Let me go!"

"Run! Run!" he bellowed, dropping her to the ground. He towed her at a gallop over the scoria toward the caldera wall. She saw the others racing ahead and noticed a rising uproar from behind and below.

"The goddam top's blowing off," Doctor Ivvins panted as they reached the chasm leading to the outer slopes. Several large boulders were danc-

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ing about. As the others charged through the gap P. jerked loose from Ivvins and turned to look.

With a cannonade of thunder, the lip on which she had been standing erupted skyward. Explosions—grindings—a pillar of blinding light: a tide of creamy orange magma welled out of the caldera floor. Heat rolled over her. An object soared out of the fire and bounced down to her feet, glowing and spitting. P. recognized its spindle shape—a volcanic bomb. How marvelous!

In the molten surface of the bomb two long, rosy, perfectly human lips formed themselves. They smiled up at her.

P. cried out wordlessly and would have flung herself on it had she not again been seized and rushed away. Ashes were now raining all around; the sky was dark. Ivvins hurried them down the bleak slopes while the mountain roared. As their plane took off P. saw the whole caldera wall spring slowly outwards on a comber of dark flame. HIS farewell gesture! She hugged it to her soul, and later wired Reinhold to repay the survivors.

Joyfully, P. returned to her studies—and met with a setback. Her courses were now taking her beneath HIS skin into HIS vast body. HIS true size began to reach her mind. The abyssal deeps of ocean, she saw, were to HIM no more than the dimples of her own back. What lay beneath? Hopefully she followed her teachers down through the sialic crust, past the Andesite line, into the deep sima layer. But all this was still epidermal. The Mohorovic probes were only pinpricks to HIM. Even the volcanic magmas seemed to be crustal formations, no deeper than a sebaceous cyst. Under that, they told her, lay hundreds of miles of an olivine substance called the mantel. And within that, like a planetary yolk two thousand miles wide, was HIS inner core. Ah! What was there?

To her intense disappointment, no one seemed to know. HIS vital regions were pictured as homogenous doughs, differing only in their probable states of plasticity. Earnestly she listened to theories of deep, slow convections and of mysterious currents which might be related to HIS radiant auras. Her interest was briefly caught by HIS whimsical shifting of magnetic poles; Ah yes, HE had been restless! But when she read of the superconductive properties of matter presumed to form HIS heart, it meant nothing to hers. Of plasmas in general she was told more than she desired, but of HIS plasma, nothing. What did it matter that something in HIS deeps eliminated perpendicular S-waves while speeding the P-wave compressive primaries?

She realized that her teachers knew nothing vital. Their interest ended where hers began. Pausing only to endow a geomagnetic institute, she departed for the astronomers.

And here everything went sour at once.

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She was afterwards to think of this as the bad time, the time of testing. It began when her remaining uncle, Hilliard, died.

The funeral was in Winnetka, two days before classes began. P. held her father's thin arm, oppressed by pangs of merely human loneliness and love. Her father had grown grey and more harassed than ever by the avalanches of wealth. Afterwards they dined together in O'Hare's executive lounge.

"Just you and me, now," her father said somberly. He said it again.

"Poor Uncle Hilly."

"Yes, terrible. Dreadful. What possessed him? Suspended animation, cryowhatsis. It's a wonder all that hydrogen didn't blow the town up." He prodded the butter plate. "I don't think this is butter . . . And poor old Robbie eating those mushrooms. George struck by lightning. Marion and Fred. And Daphne, that wave, a tsunami, was it? Hurricanes, earthquakes. Rock slides. Acts of god. The whole family, just wiped out."

He sighed. P. clasped his hand; she knew he missed her mother frightfully.

"Just you and me, now." Thoughtfully he studied his daughter. His lavender eyes were cold. His forebears, after all, had raised the dolmens of Stonehenge.

"I'm putting everything in your name," he said so clearly that the lawyers at the next table looked around. "Every penny. I'm turning it all right over to you."

"Oh, daddy! I'll take care of you."

He smiled, not hopefully. She squeezed his hand, wondering what he knew.

"Your mother," he said in a low voice. "We never told you . . . Before you came along she had a stone baby."

"A *what?*"

"That's what they called it. There's some name. Not a baby, really. Bones and teeth. Hair. It had to be taken out."

"Oh, God, Daddy. How awful."

"Yes." He looked at her with wry love. "Be careful, my dear."

A stone baby? P. thought. What had HE tried?

As they embraced at the gate he said again, loudly, "It's all going into your account, dear. I don't want any of it."

But he was not, it seemed, quick enough. That weekend a meteorite struck the fifteenth hole at Ekwanok, Vermont, killing him and a passing chipmunk.

This was P.'s first real grief. The ruthlessness of HIS love. *Cleaving the others.* She wept, with new sobriety; understanding at last that this was no child's game.

Gravely she began her new cosmological studies. It pleased her to learn

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that Earth's infancy, like her own, had featured an ammonia atmosphere. HIS larger relatives seemed another set of uncles—Jupiter broadcasting enigmatically, Saturn plumply beringed, Uranus traveling in recumbent pose. That Earth was only an average sort of planet she rejected; to her HE was magnificent. And then there was the yellow Sun around which they all so faithfully revolved.

Here the first pang smote her.

What, precisely, was HIS bond with that blazing body? What was this "gravity" that attracted HIM so?

She stopped dead on the steps of the Science Building and squinted up at the Sun. The center of HIS life, HIS hot star. Could it be—was it possible that that blond astral entity was HIS real love? HIS lawful, public mate?

Stunned, she sank upon the steps. Fire was in her closed eyes, humiliation in her heart. Of course, she thought. She is HIS equal. I am nothing—a toy, HIS little animal diversion. She—eleven thousand degrees Fahrenheit at the photosphere—*she* is HIS wife!

Of the rest of that day she recalled only taking several Seconals.

Next morning she awoke to find this first nightmare gone. How could she have been so stupid, she wondered; not to have seen the simple gestalt. Small ones around a big one—the Sun was not HIS mate, she was HIS mother!

Relieved, she returned to class. But only to be stricken anew.

Earth had, she learned, been circling HIS stellar parent for a very long time. About five billion years, in fact. Even in astral terms this struck her as much too long a time for a son to hang upon his mother. Why did HE not break free? His planetary siblings also seemed content to remain forever at their mother's side. How sad! But wait—what about those asteroids? Perhaps there had been a planet in Bode's fifth place, a being who had somehow burst loose, hatched and flown away leaving bits of shell behind? Then Earth might do likewise!

She questioned her professor, and hope died. Those confused rocks, it seemed, were by their mass only addled fragments of a planet unborn. Or early dead, like—she shuddered—a stone baby.

No, none of them had escaped. HE was stuck forever in HIS dull maternal round. The thought depressed her; the certainty of brilliant consummation in which she had lived so long withered away. Was her great love only to end like a bourgeois French farce, where the son brings his bride home to revolve for dreary eternity under his mother's rule? NO! Surely HE had a greater destiny. Surely HE meant somehow to be free. Perhaps she could help!

She sought out the professor again and questioned him on the force required to break Earth from HIS orbit and set HIM free in space. (The

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professor watched her young lap quiver and told himself that teaching was a sacred trust.) His somewhat disjointed answer dismayed her so that she never recalled it exactly. To move Earth, she saw, was quite beyond any capability of man. Even if Earth were somehow to discharge HIMSELF like a rocket, it would do no more than widen HIS orbit. He was trapped!

She went drearily away to walk the winter beach, longing to sense HIS presence, HIS deep sustaining rapport. She had not, she realized, felt HIS nearness for some time. What was wrong? *Oh my love, where are you? Speak to me,* she pleaded silently. The surf splashed emptily. Nothing.

The blasphemous thought crossed her mind that perhaps HE did not leave because HE was quite cozy here, was stolidly content with HIS mother. To distract herself she glanced at a letter crumpled in her hand. It was from Reinhold. Another boring increase in her wealth. Another of HIS gifts—but not the one she craved.

As the moon rose over the coastal mountains, a terrifying idea rose with it. She had once had a great deal of bother from an elderly admirer who kept hiding diamond ear-clips in her broiled grapefruit. And waylaying her with pathetic obscenities and gifts, gifts, gifts . . .

Could Earth be . . . *old?*

Oh, no! No!

But as she eyed the raddled moon, certainty grew. Oh yes—it would explain everything. All the illusory fondlings and ticklings, the promises leading nowhere. The interminable useless gifts. The destruction of her whole family, leaving her so alone—was that not the act of senile jealousy?

Five . . . billion . . . years?

HE was no young virile lover, HE was old—old—old!

And that decrepit moon up there—was she not in truth HIS old wife, hanging on? Why, HE had even arranged to send her emissaries. Oh, yes. *Old.* It was too desolating to be borne.

She dropped to the sand and cried like a child. But when her weeping was over, she knew another truth. She loved HIM still. HIS age, she thought painfully, is not HIS fault. She must accept it, find what joy she could in the afterglow of HIS life. She had loved HIM too long to stop. HE was all she had.

Soul-sick, she wanted only to flee. Departing from the college, she made herself assign Uncle Hilliard's main patents to the observatory, but she would not look again at the stars. When someone joked about the "ancient sands of Mars" she broke into tears.

Where to go, what to do? On impulse she flew to the forest that had been HIS first temple; it seemed shrunken and dead. She did not even

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walk to the great rock but only sent the keys to a realtor—an unthinkable act—and fled back to her New York penthouse.

It was the absolute nadir of her life, bar one.

Fearing to be alone, she accepted invitations at random, but laughter was intolerable; she fled among the hellos. She took several lovers and forgot their names. Reinhold caught her praying to HIM and sent round two psychiatrists. When she refused to talk with either he sent another disguised as an electrician, who burnt his hand in the fusebox.

In these depths began what she was later to call the Time of Omens. But she was too miserable to understand.

They started quietly. Her florist's bill was misrouted to Alaska. She phoned her garage and found herself speaking with a child in Labrador. As spring came on her mailbox filled up with ads for arctic outfitters, and a travel agency kept sending her elaborate schedules for a Hudson Bay charter they claimed she had requested.

Desperate, she let a new lover take her to a private ski preserve in Montana. Mortally offending him by morning, she skied out alone to meet her rented Mercedes. Animals seemed to be behaving oddly. Three antelope came close enough to touch; a lynx actually loped alongside. When she rested a coyote came up and softly pulled her parka with its teeth.

"You're as crazy as I am," she told it sadly.

On her drive to the airport a flock of snow geese buzzed the car until she had the driver stop. They circled at eye level, yelping their urgency. *North! To the North!* She shook her head and drove on to board the jet, noticing vaguely that the car compass was spinning.

It was on this plane that ACTION began at last.

A servile youth named Amory had come to escort her home; the lawyers seemed to feel him needful. Amory was a harmless youth, with a mania for telephoning. As he installed her in first class he chattered about something in the news. She huddled in her furs, enduring a world without meaning. They flew on through darkness. There was some sort of disarray in the command cabin ahead; comings and goings, tense reassurances on the speaker. Amory ran about fussing. P. couldn't care less.

Finally the plane was landing. At Cleveland. Correction: It was not Cleveland, but some strange place called Val d'Or in Quebec. This attracted her attention. When the doors opened she sent Amory out and waited for the pilot.

"Captain, what is happening?"

He looked sharply at the pale luxury rising from the lounge chair. Unwisely, he looked too long; his nerves were in rags. As they went to the door he babbled out an ordeal of instruments bewitched, ghost beacons, radio garble.

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"The damn jet stream has gone crazy," he told her. "We're five hundred miles north of Ohio. Excuse me. Look at that!"

They were at the top of the ramp. The night above them blazed with auroral lights. Ropes of green fire wreathed, rayed eerily, arrowed into a torch on the black horizon, rippled out and re-formed instantly.

She gazed, recognizing Polaris in the arrow's heart. North . . . ? A lodestone in her soul shuddered, the lost feeling of connection awoke in her bones. All the meaningless signals of the past months meshed. She laid her gloved hand on the pilot's arm.

"Captain, I shall get off here." She smiled tremulously. "Please . . . try your machines again. I think the call is for me."

Amory found her in the small charter office engaging a Beaver seaplane for Churchill via Moosonee.

"You go on home, Amory. I won't need you. Besides, it might be dangerous."

This was an error; one of Amory's telephonic clients was her insurance firm. When she saw he would not be left she changed the charter to an Otter and told him to find rooms in the airfield motel.

Her legs were trembling so that she could scarcely walk to her quarters; she sank onto a chair in darkness and watched the silent heavens burn. Cold fire, white, rosy, green—cosmic veils writhing and parting, repeating always the torch, the luminous arrow to the north. *HE is calling me at last,* she whispered over and over. *At last, at last.* Her eyes streamed tears; all over her body the sealed springs were melting. *My love is calling, HE needs me!* Old, ill, dying—what did it matter? *I am yours, I come, I come* . . . She sat by the window all night.

At dawn she and Amory boarded the Otter and began to chug north. What about Amory, she wondered; was he wanted too?

At Moosonee she was answered. Hastening across the field to telephone, Amory yelled and vanished as a sump-line caved under him. P. left him in the Moosonee infirmary with a concussion and her AT&T card. The Otter churned on north.

The muskeg below her was a monotone moire plain of lakes and scrub, shadowed by islands of rain, occasionally greyed by burns or the garbage of a camp. P. watched the winding water-patterns change from dark to light with the changing sun. *Beloved, I am coming—coming—coming!* her heart sang to the piston drone. They landed to refuel at a bush cache. She sat quietly oblivious to the blackflies swarming in the cabin.

At the second stop the pilot began to stare openly. He was a beet-faced veteran, used to being the taciturn one. He offered her insect dope.

"No thank you." She smiled. He slapped his neck and took off rather roughly, whistling a tune that had been obscene in his youth.

An hour later she startled him by asking for his chart. He scratched

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out their heading with a pencil stub. She checked the chart legend and sat back, her face radiant.

She had confirmed that her course was approximating the line of zero declination. The arrow had summoned her, not to the axial north, but to HIS magnetic pole. Of course; the mysterious font of HIS radiances. Where was it exactly? 75° N by 101° W, somewhere above Boothia Peninsula. Bathurst Island, that sounded right. *Oh Love, I hasten!* The plane was so miserably slow . . .

The pilot's headset began to gabble. He listened intently, changed channels, swore, listened again. The Churchill coastline was ahead. He pointed down. She saw two long wakes curving away to the east. Only a solitary tanker was left in port. The airfield too looked empty. Surprisingly, they had to circle in the sunset while two planes took off and fled away southward.

When they were down she followed him through a crowd in the office, looking for the big wall charts.

"Can you take me up to there, to Spence Bay? And then on north?"

"Sure." He signed off his clipboard. "Next week."

"Oh, no. I mean tomorrow. Early."

"Na-ah, soon as it's light I'm scooting for Chiboo. Big front coming up from Winnipeg."

"But I *must!* It's—it's very important, I'd be glad to pay double, anything—" Her beautiful eyes misted, her hands squeezed his arm.

"Lady, I wouldn't stay here for a solid gold, uh, lollipop."

"Oh, please—look, could you possibly find me a plane? I *have* to go, my—someone very dear to me is up there."

He frowned down at her, abruptly banged his clipboard on the wall. "Anybody for Spence Bay in the morning? Lady says she'll pay heavy."

The men around the weather ticker glanced up and turned away again. Only one face kept attentive, a thin boy with a black widow's peak pompadour.

"Frenchy, you still got those tanks on?"

"It is stupid." The boy moved a step closer. Unobtrusively P. took out her pale mauve bill-clip and began to peel hundreds.

"One would puncture a pontoon, perhaps worse."

She peeled another, another, until the boy made a quick bow and approached.

"You understand it is hazardous? Madame is prepared to sit among the ducks?"

"Lady wants to find somebody."

"Ah."

"Please load all the gas you can," she told him. "We may have to go beyond Spence Bay. I'll leave all my other bags. How early can we start?"

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"At three, Madame."

So began the last stage of her voyage to HIM, which she still thought of as a mission of comfort.

That night she spent sitting in the airport waiting room, her cheek against the storm window, watching HIS glory. Churchill was used to the auroras; there was an aurora research station here. But this display was epic. Colored arcs, rays, racing floodlights, skywide fluted draperies of fire, a silent conflagration. From time to time dark figures wandered out on the tarmac, bottles in hand, faces to the sky. The zenith wept emeralds, rubies, zircons, swirled in diamond spokes.

P. gazed avidly, hoping HE might reveal something of his need. Auroras, she knew, were linked to solar flares. Could HIS mother be calling too? She bit her lip and noticed that the radio man was asking if she was all right.

"Yes, thank you."

He slammed off his static-ridden consoles and went to his cot. Presently she heard him snore. The celestial fires quickened. They seemed to be pulsing now, flowing in sensual rhythms. P.'s heart began to thud. Somehow this light-show did not suggest debility. It did not seem like a cry for . . . help. What was HE conveying?

Suddenly the midnight rainbows spun, rippled gigantically and parted. To reveal a fiery hieroglyph of such starkly erotic menace that her belly cringed.

Could *that* be senile teasing?

"No!" her body answered.

The scandalous shape exploded up the sky, carrying with it all her sad delusions. HE was not old, not sick! HE was young! Young and supremely male, calling her to HIM at last as she had always known HE would!

She sobbed aloud as the radiance flowered outward in forms of ineffable seduction. *Oh, my love, my love, my love—*

Finally the short night paled to dawn. Her pilot arrived. To carry her on her last, her nuptial flight. To HIM.

They took off under a grey-yellow sky. The lights of other planes winked out behind them, fleeing south. In the north ahead the air was clear and still. Her pilot, whose name turned out to be Edouard, tossed his headset down.

"The barometer rises," he grinned. "Where is this famous front?"

Hours crawled by. The loaded *Norseman* plodded north. To endure, P. let Edouard explain the dual controls. She was regretting her indiscretion when wisps of cloud scudded past them, coming from behind. She turned and saw a great bank of stratus in the south. Sobered, Edouard climbed above the scud. It rapidly became a solid floor of fleece, lit by the low sun on their right.

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P. noticed that the air in the vents felt warmer, almost tropical. She smiled in wonder. HIS bridal air! Even the *Norseman*'s engines seemed quieter, more swift. But Edouard's face grew more and more pinched.

"What is it?"

"A tail wind." He tried his radio again, joggled his DDF transceiver array. "Not possible. I look."

The plane nosed down into grey wool and it grew cold. Finally they came out beneath the clouds. They were over big water; Hudson Bay? Edouard swore incredulously as his earphones squeaked. Then he banked the *Norseman* into a U-turn.

"Madame, I am sorry. We must go back."

"No, no! Why?"

"That crazy wind up there, it is four hundred kilometers. The RCAF tells everybody must go out. Spence Bay is evacuated, Madame, it is no use you go there."

"Oh, no, *please!*" She stared in horror as the compass swung implacably to 180. South, away from HIM.

"Madame, I have no choice. I regret."

"Edouard, how much does this plane cost?"

"This? Oh, about two hundred sixty, three hundred thousand U.S. dollars. And the magnetometers extra."

She was clicking a combination on her dainty mauve credit-transfer unit. Then she thumb-printed its window and signed it with a tiny gold stylus. A purple credit chip emerged.

"Here, Edouard. I want to buy your plane."

He looked at it, looked again and whistled.

"Take it, Edouard, it's good. See the certified balance?" She flipped the case over, showing nine digits. "You can radio that station to confirm it, I'll pay."

"I believe you, Madame. But if I sell you this plane, what then?"

"Then you'll fly me back north. You don't have to worry, if it's my plane."

He pushed her hand gently away. "Believe me, Madame, I am sorry. But money is no use to the dead."

"*Edouard!* Please, I must go north, the one I love—can't you understand? I'll pay anything! *Please*—"

"I am so sorry, so sorry." His face worked but the controls stayed steady. "I am not a coward, Madame. *Voyons,* at the first moment after this storm I bring you to Spence Bay, anywhere! For free!" he added desperately.

"No, no, no . . . " She sobbed. The *Norseman* labored on and on through greyness, the compass implacably struck at 180°. Her whole body seethed in protest, aching to turn back north. Up above them HIS bridal wind

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blew empty while she was carried helplessly away. What to do? Should she ask Edouard to land, and simply start walking north? But this country was impossible, she knew that. And her slippers. *Help me, Love! Help me!* But how could HE?

The plane droned blindly southward, hours or years. Finally the windows brightened. They flew out into sunlight above the clouds. Edouard's head snapped around.

"The sun!" he gasped. He began pounding his compass.

The sun? It was behind them on their left. Why, they could not be flying south! They had been flying north—the whole time! Toward HIM!

Dizzy with thankfulness she lay back in her seat. *Oh Love, how could I have doubted Your powers?* Beside her the distraught pilot was kicking and yanking his controls. The *Norseman* dipped one wing, then the other, and sailed steadily northward, rising into the mighty wind. The compass whirled playfully.

"The pig, it is fooked!" Edouard turned appalled eyes. "It does not do nothing!"

She was almost too happy to speak. "It's all right, Edouard. Really. Don't be frightened."

But he was, he twisted in his seat gasping at the strange things flying with them on the tide of HIS stupendous wind. She saw palm trees, roofs, billboards, tangles of nameless debris, all tumbling slowly in the clear sunlight above the snowy millrace of cloud. A huge vulture-like bird—could it be a condor?—sailed woodenly by.

"Look—a plane!" Edouard seized his binoculars. A fat four-engine jet was following them, flying crabwise. It seemed to have U.S. Air Force markings.

"The doors are open," Edouard whispered. "They have abandoned." He crossed himself and peered down. "I think it is Spence Bay there." There was a turbulent seam in the clouds ahead; a coast. Edouard hit the flaps again and switched off the motors.

Nothing happened; the props roared on.

His eyes rolled, he whispered prayers. The coastal rift came nearer. What was she to do about Edouard? Intolerable to have him tagging along at the supreme moment of her life. What was HIS plan? Or was this one of those details the male expects his mate to cope with?

Edouard had roused himself and was dragging out the chutes. "We must jump, Madame." He thrust one at her.

She took out the credit chip and poked it into his hand. When he looked up she was by the far wall, pointing a small gold cannister at him.

"You jump, Edouard. Leave me. I shall be quite all right. And don't try anything silly or I'll paralyze you with this deadly gas."

"But no, Madame!"

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"Edouard, go! I mean it. Do you think this is a natural phenomenon? Jump now or you'll be killed!"

"You must, I will—"

As he reached for her the cabin window beside him crashed in and the cabin swirled with warm air and chips of perspex. A large wet object with tentacles flailing plastered itself on the torn window.

Edouard made a mewing sound. He looked down past the plane's wing which was now lit with Elmo's fire and looked back at the beautiful crazy girl. His Gallic soul took over. He tucked the credit chip in his pocket, bowed, and leaped out the door.

Blissfully alone! P. laughed for joy, moving into the pilot's seat to pull the door shut. The plane seemed to be flying itself perfectly, a toy on the torrent of HIS breath. The sunlit flood of cloud below seemed to stand still as she outraced it north. The squid had blown away. A swarm of mice, or perhaps lemmings, twinkled by.

P. glanced behind. The southern sky was filled with a towering wall of darkness; it boiled and flashed murkily, following her up the curve of the world. Warm air, she knew, caused condensation. This great piston of storm must be surging up the tropic stream in which she rode. A continental carriage to HIS arms. All for her! *Oh Love, am I worthy at last?*

Rapturously she drew off her toque and gloves and began to brush out her hair. All the years of waiting, longing, striving for a sign from HIM, despairing of HIS love. While *this* lay ahead! She put the brush away, sinuously fluffed the new amethyst furs. And the charming underthing, too . . . to think she had nearly worn that dreadful puce suede! Of course HE would probably not notice such details, she thought; males usually did not; but perhaps the general effect would please HIM before . . . before her clothing ended where all bridal finery must.

Her loins were quivering luxuriously. She applied a rare scent (from the gold cannister) and lay back to wait. To be totally ready for HIM.

Outside the sun was rolling into the west, lighting green and apricot shadows in the cloud. It would not get dark, she realized; this was mid-summer night. Oh exquisite! And there was music, a bone-deep melodious booming like the pound of a great heart. HIS heart? Her own pounded; she saw the plane was losing altitude, sinking toward the clouds. *IT is really happening!*

Warmth surged within her, her limbs were heavy with deliciousness. HIS presence, HIS slightest touch would be bliss so acute as to be almost pain. Even pain would be bliss . . . A tiny thought pricked her; HE was so huge. HE—the very Earth—how, actually, would HE take her?

What if it REALLY hurt?

She pushed back the traitor thought. They were skimming the cloud

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tops now. There was something shiny sticking up ahead. What could it be?

It swept toward her and she saw. An enormous penis of ice! Like the long-ago mushroom but miles high and— Oh—hideous! Deformed —brutally ridged and swollen—bestial—fiendish—

P. gasped, invaded by her first fear. What really lay ahead? What did she truly know of HIM? When HE had destroyed her family she had seen it as love—but what if HE was not loving at all? What if HE was cruel? Or totally alien?

For the first time she grasped how fragile her tiny body was. A few degrees of temperature, the fall of a stone would kill her. And HE who flung mountains, HE was her world! Even HIS love would surely immolate her. She had been mad. She was rushing to ghastly death!

She wailed as two more savage ice obscenities flashed by, imagining a vast unhuman face peering at the bloody scraps of her body. Could she leap out, escape? She clutched the parachute, staring at the dreadful storm wall that loomed behind.

It writhed darkly as if alive. As she looked, two immense nimbus swells joined and took on shape. Slowly it penetrated her panic. It was an eye! But an eye of cosmic grandeur, divinely carved, unquestionably young and male. Lightnings played gently within it like the beams of love.

Transfixed, P. saw the two great lids meet and open in a wink of planetary tenderness.

She fell back into her seat, all fear gone. *How* could she have mistrusted HIM? This new air told of HIS consideration. And how subtly HE had manipulated the plane's electronic controls! Of course he would be tender with her. HE understood all—whatever He planned would be heaven. She laughed in ecstasy as another outrageous ice-phallus went by. *Oh Love, into Your hands—*

Suddenly the plane dived into the clouds and the cabin went dark. The dive seemed very steep; hesitantly she touched the controls, wondering if HE expected her to assist. Perhaps it was not fit to arrive at the consummation of her life like a blob of fondue? The cabin rocked as something hurtled over in the gloom—it was the derelict cargo plane. There was a bright place in the gloom ahead. She forced her languid limbs to action and checked the dive, just as the plane burst into open sunlight. Cold green sea lay below.

She saw she was in a vast open crater in the clouds, like the eye of a hurricane. Ice peaks towered all around; the open sea was only a narrow channel. The *Norseman* was still going much too fast. How to land? No matter—HE was here, HE was just ahead, she could feel HIS nearness now!

She set the flaps, trusting—and sure enough, a blast of wind struck

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them head-on. The pontoons hit. The plane bounced and then was floating to an ice-ramp at the water's edge. A shining path led up the ramp and passed behind an ice crag.

HE would be there! HE, HE!

Weak with love she climbed out into the balmy air, barely remembering her bag. The ice-towers were wild carvings of topaz and viridian against the dark walls of cloud.

As the *Norseman* touched the ice there came a loud windrush overhead and the cargo plane plunged down. She ducked. It struck with a clang that shook the peaks.

When the noise died away she saw it had totaled itself on the crags above the landing ramp. No smoke—but what was the brilliant debris showering out and rolling on the path?

She stepped ashore—and saw that it was flowers! An acre of flowers was strewn around her way! Breathless with astonishment she started up the path, recognizing orchids, cymbidiums, vandas from Hawaii. And living birds were now flying out of the wreck—parakeets, lovebirds, finches of every color came fluttering down about her in the warmth. A big blue and yellow macaw settled like a dazed sunrise on the ice ridge beside her.

Too much, too much— P.'s eyes were streaming, her heart raced. She sank down on the flowery ice to catch her breath. HIS tenderness, HIS love—

To calm herself she passed a finger over the blue plumage of the macaw. The bird shifted from foot to foot, whispering "Hello Polly." Then it added loudly, "Fuck the Navy."

P. giggled hysterically. Beautiful corsages were all around her feet. She picked up a magnificent cattleya spray. A riband lay under it: SECRET EYES ONLY. THE UNITED STATES AIR FORCE WISHES SENATOR BAFREW A VERY HAPPY BIRTHDAY.

Her heart calmed; HIS current was thrilling through her, calling her, upholding her. *Oh Love, I come.* She rose unsteadily, clutching the orchids and her bag. The short path before her seemed the longest in the universe. She forced her legs to move, to carry the gift of herself to HIM. Around that icy cornice she would meet—what? Blinding godhood? A storm of radiance, a divine beast? HIS love, certainly. Perhaps her death, it did not matter now. Only that HE waited there.

Her eyes were blurred with light, her whole body trembled with the sweet terror of sacrifice. Doves cooed, birds fluttered about her as she walked around the shoulder of ice.

Before her lay a sunny ice-floor like a stage. An ice-proscenium arched over it, the noble entrance of a great shadowy cave. In the sunlight before

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the arch lay a single bright orange object. It was a huge cushion or couch. Waiting.

P. gasped, vision and body melting. There, on that vast bed she would —HE would—

Carried on HIS urgence she moved forward, not hearing the singing birds. Only the great sacrificial couch, coming closer, larger—

Her heart stopped. The couch was occupied.

Protruding from the orange billow was a massive golden foot. P. stared, blinking. The foot seemed human. It was beautifully formed and big—but not inhumanly big. And there was a bronzed hand resting elegantly on the far edge . . .

She drew a long sobbing breath. The last fear fled. HE had chosen the incarnation best suited to her fragility. The classic way.

She moved breathless toward the foot. In a moment HIS perfect face would rise, HIS eyes meet her own. *Oh Love I am Yours—Yours—Yours!*

The golden foot lay unmoving, the hand was still. Closer yet—and then she understood. In HIS gentleness HE wanted her to find him in mock-sleep. HIS frail human creature would gaze upon HIM exposed and gain confidence. Flooded with gratitude, with sweet fancies of how she might "awaken" HIM, P. reached the couch and looked upon HIS form.

It was several heartbeats before she took in the enormity. The young, blond, naked man upon the couch was not asleep but squinting listlessly up at her. Her dazed eyes registered the stubble on his face, the peeling sunburn everywhere. At his side lay a bottle of Chivas Regal.

"Hallucinations are getting better," the apparition remarked hollowly.

Her jaw, her soul fell open. The ice peaks swirled among multiple visions of the blasphemous body on HIS sacred couch.

"H-H-Hadley!" she croaked. "Hadley Morton! No! No! No! No!" Screaming she dropped to her knees and beat her fists against the orange plastic. "No-o-o! Darling, where are You? Where are You?" Her head rolled dementedly, she rocked to and fro with her eyes shut.

But between her cries something was touching her from within, calming her paroxysms. She checked herself, listening. HIS impress? Yes, unmistakably. Slowly she opened her eyes, avoiding Hadley, and looked up. The gleaming ice-arch, the singing birds . . . it was all still true. She had been magically borne here to HIS holy place. And HE was here, soothing her. It had to be all right. She had made some foolish mistake, misunderstood HIS plan.

The plastic she was leaning on was stenciled, DO NOT INFLATE BEFORE DEPLANING. OSHKOSH SAFETY SYSTEMS. Hadley was peering at her over the edge.

She blew her nose resolutely and got to her feet, dislodging a cascade of little airline bottles.

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"Don't I know you?" Hadley's brow wrinkled. "If you're real, that is."

"What are you doing here, Hadley Morton?"

He shrugged in an eerie way. "About what you are, I guess. Waiting for the end of the world or whatever. Listen, I'm sorry. I've been under terrible stress, I can't seem to recall your name."

She told him.

"Fantastic." He sounded like a talk show. "Hey, you look great. I apologize, I mean, you're dressed differently."

"You aren't." She brushed off her furs, wondering what HE meant her to do. How was she to get rid of this wretched intruder? Hadley was going on about how his jet had crashed in the Atlantic. He had found himself alone on this life raft being carried by an ocean current for days and nights among the icebergs to wherever this was.

"It was all water here yesterday," he waved his hand. "Things change a lot. Everything's going crack, you know."

"What do you mean?" The mysterious-current part of Hadley's story bothered her. Had HE brought Hadley here? Why, why?

Hadley pushed a crumpled *Wall Street Journal* at her. "See for yourself. It's today's, it came in on that Sabrejet over there."

She saw that there were quite a few wrecked planes scattered among the ice crags.

"There were two blue-point Siamese cats in it, for Chrissake." He shook his head. "Lots of planes come in, you're the first with people. I got pretty bombed for a while." He gulped some Chivas Regal, wiped the bottle. "Care for some?"

"No thank you." She glanced down the stories of earthquakes in South America . . . tidal waves, eruptions . . . some catastrophe in Australia . . . HIS surface had been unquiet. Why, of course—this must be what was delaying HIM! Some problem to see to. She must be patient.

Everything was all right. She let the paper fall, puzzling over Hadley. Why was he here? Did her huge lover think she needed some sort of human companion? A servant? It would be typical of the extraordinary gifts males thought of . . .

An idea struck her.

Had HE remembered that (Oh, dear!) Hadley had pleased her once? And possibly planned to use Hadley, to incarnate HIMSELF in Hadley's—she looked at him sharply—yes, still blameless body? Apart from the sunburn it seemed to be in really splendid condition. Taller and filled out; even more adequately male. Superb, in fact . . . Well, really, what could be more suitable?

That's it, she told herself, her heart leaping with relief. *Oh Love, I understand! Yes, Yes!*

She gazed glowing at Hadley who was now pulling on his plaid briefs

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in a rather pathetic way. Strange; he had been so charming as a boy. But, Hadley the man was marvelously built, his smile was still so winning; yet he was unmistakably a slob. Well, no matter, the human personality would go when HE—when HE took over. Oh, it was hard to wait! *(Darling, hurry, please if YOU can)* . . . Meanwhile she might as well be polite to poor doomed Hadley, who was groping for his shoes.

She sat down on the raft and said kindly, "What have you been doing with yourself?"

He pulled on a black blucher. "Gehricke and Kies, medical instruments. Big line in proctoscopes. I guess you wouldn't know." He reached for the bottle, trying to grin. "I was on my way to take over the B-Berlin office."

Behind him a large animal walked uncertainly out of the cave.

"Hadley! There's a giraffe!"

"Yeah. There's two of them, came in yesterday. Other stuff too. Some zoo shipment. I dragged their alfalfa in the cave, I thought they might break a leg running around out here." He flapped his hands at the beast. "Shoo! Shoo!"

The giraffe curveted, its hooves clicking on the ice, and sidled back into the cave.

"Pair of ostriches, too." Hadley rummaged in the bottles and brought up a Pan Am snack box. "Pair of little wallabies, they got loose. I don't know how long the food will hold out. Have some?"

Unwrapping the sandwich he looked so much like his boyish self again that P. felt a pang. It was like watching the live lobster one had picked out for dinner. "Later, thank you," she said gently.

"All those birds." Hadley munched, looking around. "Quite a few of each kind, I see. Except maybe the big fellow." He waved his sandwich at the macaw who was sharpening its beak on the ice, muttering.

"Its poor feet, we should make him a perch."

Hadley nodded. "Couple of raccoons, too. Couple of cats." He nodded again, swallowed. "And now there's two of us."

He grinned.

She laughed incredulously. "Hadley, you don't know what you're saying!"

"Yes I do. I know it's all smashing up out there. And here we are, safe and warm. Two by two. What does that suggest to you, h'mmm?" He opened another sandwich, looking at her in a doggy way. "Your pills won't last forever."

"Hadley, are you actually imagining that you can repopulate the world starting with two kangaroos and a macaw? What will they all eat? You need soil and plants and—" She laughed again. "Do you think you can milk a giraffe?"

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"Ostriches lay eggs," he said stubbornly.

"Oh, nonsense."

She was saved from the ridiculous discussion by a boom overhead. Another plane burst out of the cloud wall and crashed into the ice beyond the cave. The arch reverberated.

Hadley stood up. "No fire. They're usually out of gas. I wonder if it has any beer?"

"You go."

She watched him clamber out of sight in tartan briefs and black Supphose and boots. An absurd figure in HIS glorious icescape. The great ring of cloud around them seemed to be looming higher. The sun shone; the birds sang in the sweet air. HIS charmed refuge . . . only where was HE? *How long, Oh Love?* She bowed her head; the disappointment had been so cruel. But she must be brave, be worthy . . .

A tapping roused her. The giraffe was coming out again. It was a male, she noted. She rose and walked into the great cave. It was luminously green inside, like a vast vault. HIS handiwork. For her? The other giraffe was picking at a bale of alfalfa. It was a male too. A Siamese cat paced away with its tail high; neutered.

So much for poor Hadley's theory.

Two ostriches moped about in the dimness beyond the bales. There seemed to be nothing here, no communication from HIM. *How long, Oh my Beloved? Where are You?*

HERE, replied the deeps. BE CALM. WAIT.

Unspeakably happy she walked outside again. A raccoon was shuffling potato chips in a runnel of icewater. She smiled at it and picked up Hadley's newspaper.

When he came back she was reading feverishly.

"You won't believe what was in that one." His arms were full, stacked with frozen dinners and wine bottles. "A fucking redwood tree, that's what. One big old tree, roots and all, wrapped up. Wild." He flopped down and started opening the wine.

"Hadley, do you know what orbital perturbation means?"

"Yeah, earthquakes, all that. I told you it's blowing up. Meteor's going to hit the south pole." He studied the label. "Apple-nasturtium-ginseng. Jesus."

P. looked up, her face exalted.

"Listen, Hadley. Orbital perturbation means the Earth is going to leave HIS present orbit. They're trying not to say so but it's all here. And it's not meteors. Arecibo estimates that this so-called wandering planetoid has more mass than Earth."

Hadley drank, staring at her.

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"It isn't going to hit us, don't you understand? It's only coming near enough to pull us loose from the sun."

He wiped his mouth. "If it's so big why don't we see it?"

"Because its perihelion is due south, there aren't many observatories there. And its albedo is low."

"You know a lot, don't you?"

She stood up, startling the birds. "Hadley, Earth is going out, away from the sun. Our atmosphere will freeze. Everything will die, everything. Crustal instability. The continents will probably break up."

"End of the world," he sighed. "I told you."

"End? No—the beginning!" She raised her rapt face to the sun blazing low above the cloud wall. "HE is breaking free at last. At last! Oh, my darling!"

"Still on that," Hadley remarked.

She frowned at him. "What?"

"You and your communion with the earth-god or whatever."

"*I never told you that!*"

He chuckled depressedly. "Oh man. You were one weird kid." He drank again, shuddered. "Incredible ass, however. Never deny that."

She turned away, furious, and then checked herself. He couldn't help being so repulsive. "Try to think, Hadley. Doesn't anything strike you as a little unusual? Are you sure?"

He rubbed his sunburnt, stubbled face. "What do you think I got so smashed for?" he said thickly. "Riding on that raft, everybody dead, like a goddamn Flying Whosis. I saw things . . . maybe you aren't really here."

"I'm here. It is HIS plan. You'll see."

"Totally insane." He shook his blond head, suddenly showed his teeth. "I got a plan too. While there's life there's nooky."

Just in time she leaped away from his lunge.

"Hadley!"

But he had stopped and was staring beyond her.

"*Those clouds are getting closer.*"

She turned and saw that the wall of storm enclosing them seemed to have drawn in; the open space was smaller. Prudently she walked away from poor Hadley along the path up which she had come. Birds flocked by, heading toward the cave. A small red kangaroo hopped after them among the tumbled ice.

The far end of the water was now hidden in a churning cliff of grey fog, with brilliant sunset colors on its crest. Awesome . . . Amid all the upheavals now going on HE had made her this sanctuary, away from the worst effects of the passing planet. Or whatever this dark stranger was whom HE was going to follow—she caught herself. No more jeal-

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ousies! Not with the evidence of HIS precious love all round her. Think only of sharing HIS sacred liberation, the dawn of HIS new life.

How wondrous . . . As P. strolled back toward the arch the thought passed fleetingly through her mind that HE might be quite young. Five billion years? Perhaps this was only HIS divine boyhood!

She smiled with a new maternal voluptuousness, and noticed that Hadley was all bent over, making a ragged snoring noise. Why, he was crying. And holding up an open wallet, running his fingers over the photographs. How kind of HIM to have sent liquor to ease the poor Hadley while he waited for extinction.

"Have some more wine, Hadley."

While he drank she studied him. Magnificent; Hadley had really kept in shape. What would that body be like when HE entered, transfigured it with HIS glory? Her body melted; to distract herself she looked at the animals and birds now thronging into the cave. The space before the arch was full of charming creatures. Was it possible HE intended to preserve them in whatever unimaginable dwelling HE had planned for her? A lovely idea. But perhaps they would have to be really preserved, that is, frozen. A pity. Still, they were only animals.

She picked up a sandwich and began tossing crumbs to the birds, seeing the rosy spires of ice around them wink out one by one as the clouds drew in. The macaw clambered down, rasping "Navy? Polly?" The light was changing, deepening to weird amber and violet.

"I'm cold," Hadley groaned.

"Don't worry. Everything will be all right."

The air was turning chill now. And the great cloud walls had come quite close. Her furs rustled with electricity. She realized that tension was building all about them. *Soon! IT will happen soon!*

"Christ!" said Hadley thickly, "How I wish I'd never met you!"

For an instant his fear infected her. She looked up at the roiling cloud cliffs. They were about to cover the sun. Would she ever see it again, see blue skies? A booming shuddered through the ice underfoot. Her throat knotted in panic. HIS coming? HIS immensity—a god loved her—

A sneeze recalled her from her fright. It was the macaw, waddling into the cave. Behind it paced a raccoon with a flower in its mouth. "Oh, please save them," P. whispered.

She and Hadley were alone in the last sunlight now. The ice boomed again.

"It's coming for us," Hadley said hoarsely. "Look—"

The orange raft was silently sliding away from them. She saw that it was being towed by little arctic foxes. They drew it into the shadowy cave and lay down, panting.

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"By God," Hadley croaked, "It's a zoo. Something is collecting us. D-don't go in there."

At that moment the sun winked out, swallowed in the looming cloud. A mushy crumbling sound rolled around them. It was starting. HE was breaking free. P. thought of the terrible havoc that must be wracking the puny cities of men now. HIS fires bursting out, whole cities tumbling.

Suddenly something poked between her buttocks. She spun around. A small polar bear was pointing its nose at her crotch. She stumbled backward toward the cave, bumping into Hadley. The bear followed, weaving its long neck.

"It wants us inside," said Hadley faintly.

They backed in together, P. fuming with indignation. Really, to be goosed at such a moment! But as her leg struck the raft her indignation melted. How boyish of HIM, how—how Earthy! Thrilling with sexual submissiveness she sank upon the cushiony raft.

The bear stopped. A deep crack jarred the cave and ice showered down outside the entrance where they had been. P. felt Hadley's arm tighten around her hips. She flung it off and stood up.

"Really, Hadley!"

"Look out!" He pointed behind her. The white bear was advancing again with its fangs bared. She sat back down. It stopped.

"See?" said Hadley in a high, abnormal voice.

"What?"

Only silence answered her. The creatures around them had become unnaturally quiet, the stir of life was stilling in the green-lit vault. P. shivered; the warmth seemed to be fading too. Shafts of apocalyptic light wheeled past the cave entrance, the ice groaned distantly and ceased. Was HE about to enter at last?

The macaw squawked, making her jump. "Fuck!" it screeched and fell over stiffly on its side.

"That's it," Hadley said. He was kneeling in the center of the raft. "We end as we began and all that sort of thing. Take it off."

He flipped up her furs and grabbed her breast.

She wrenched free and floundered away from him across the orange plastic, distracted by the bear. Hadley fell forward at her, clutching her thighs.

"Are you out of your mind? HE's coming for me—don't you know I'm HIS? Get away or HE will—HE'LL punish you."

Hadley grinned horribly like an exhausted dog; his hands were cold and shaking. Thunder pealed outside.

"*He's* not coming, princess. He's going. We're dead." He licked his lips. "Just remember I got here too. I'd say it wants us both. Hurry up!" He tore at her clothes.

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Desperate, she kicked him—and suddenly to her infinite relief a globe of violet light appeared in the cave-mouth and floated toward them. Hadley moaned; the light hovered behind him like a halo.

This was the moment! HE was about to take over Hadley!

The air was terribly cold now, but a current was moving in her belly, tensing her sex. *Oh Love, is it you at last?*

The current pulsed stronger in her, like an unseen hand. She saw the white bear had hold of her slipper, was pulling it off. It slumped to the ice and lay still . . . *Love*?

YES.

Oh yes! yes! yes! Love! Wildly she sent her numb fingers down the closure of her amethyst silks, her eyes on Hadley's face. *Love, show THYSELF!* Her clothes fell open, letting in more cold. Hadley was jerking like a golem, trying to tear his shorts free from a gigantic erection.

"God, it's cold. C-Come on." The face was still only mortal Hadley, mouth shaking loosely, eyes bleary with fear. But the halo seemed to brighten. *Hurry, Love!*

Her teeth chattering, she unpeeled the delicious cache-sexe, and at that moment saw Hadley's face change. But—oh!—it was not the change she'd expected, it was only the crumpling of his features, tears welling out and rolling down his jaws. He ripped his briefs open and the tears splashed onto his great swollen glans. A terrible doubt opened in her soul.

"Stop! Hadley, stop!"

But he flung himself heavily onto her, his icy hands expertly parting, inserting with brutal thrusts, his face buried in her neck.

She writhed, trying to hope. Was this a god's probe in her, this cold tearing pain? Her body was freezing—and yet she could feel her sex rocking mechanically, driven by a cold itch, answering Hadley's thrusts in agony. Could she be dying? She became aware that Hadley was whimpering as he bucked and crushed her—a woman's name, Jenny or Penny. Horror rose. No god was in her, but only Hadley Morton ten years overripe.

"Help me!" she shrieked to the icy darkness, "Oh Love, Oh my god, where are You?"

And as before the enormous silence answered.

HERE. I AM HERE.

"*Save me!*"

But the cold lust in her loins only quickened unbearably, her sex was smiting and grinding against Hadley as if they were dolls jerking on a grid. She screamed, screamed under Hadley's frigid chest.

GOOD. GOOD. GO ON. I AM HERE.

Terrible understanding stilled her screams.

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HE was not coming in to her, HE was outside—*a spectator*. HE wanted this, only this!

Grief, degradation colder than the ice drained her heart. She whimpered in torment, as her back slid on the freezing plastic. Hadley's assault was slowing now, her own dreadful zombie jerks were slowing down. Like dying toys. Her tears had frozen against Hadley's flesh.

They were dying. As the realization came to her, a long agonizing spasm rose and gripped her sex and shuddered out through their joined bellies.

GOOOOOD, said the unhuman void.

And with that her last illusion fell away. HE had never loved her, HE did not want her at all. What HE wanted was this—herself and Hadley. A toy, an amusement that had somehow attracted HIS notice on that long-ago summer, had titillated HIM. HE wanted only to put it together again.

All the rest, all her lifelong dialog of love—it was all garbage.

Her tears were stones of ice on her eyes, her lips were crusted with ice. Cold sparks flickered on her upturned thighs. Snow. No warmth remained now, the great cave was utterly silent and dark. Hadley seemed to have stopped breathing. A lost impulse of human solidarity moved her; she tried to press his back, but her hand was frozen. Locked under his cold body, she waited for death.

They would go out to space with HIM, ludicrously conjoined for eternity. Along with the frozen forms of flowers, giraffes, birds, a redwood tree—whatever had diverted HIM among the brief creatures of HIS skin. Not a zoo. A museum . . .

Snow was piling around her now. The cave will presently fill, she thought. Very quiet . . . Very deep . . . In the cooling axons of her brain the ion crests formed their last faint thought and stabilized forever.

—AS WITH IMMENSE SLOW JOY THE VERY YOUNG BEING WHO HAD BEEN KNOWN AS EARTH FOUND HIMSELF ABLE TO ANSWER THE CALL OF HIS NEWFOUND PLAYMATE, AND, STOWING SAFELY A FEW SPECIAL TREASURES OF HIS CHILDHOOD DAYS, HE SWEPT AT LAST FROM HIS DULL BIRTH ORBIT TO SEEK ADVENTURE AMONG THE STARS. ●

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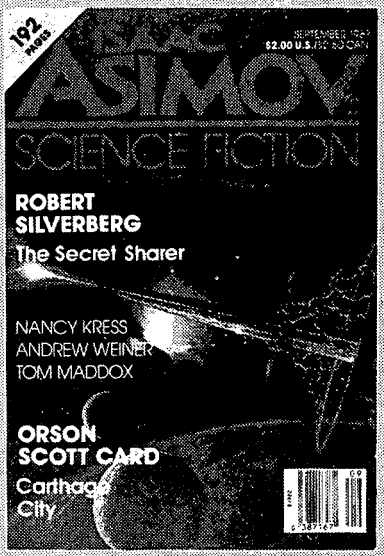

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DSE8S-6

ON BOOKS

by Baird Searles

Very Friendly Persuasion

Pennterra
By Judith Moffett
Congdon & Weed, $17.95

A sinking feeling, that's what you get after the first couple of chapters of Judith Moffett's *Pennterra.* Why? Well, there's this colonizing band of humans struggling to establish a foothold on the alien world of Pennterra. They're Quakers, and therefore really nice folks (are there any nasty Quakers in literature?), which is why they call the world Pennterra, as in Pennsylvania. And they've established a strong rapport with the intelligent but primitive natives, who have four legs, four arms and enough telepathic empathy for any ten races. The natives are really nice folks, too, which is why the humans have nicknamed them *hrossa* after the kindly aliens in C. S. Lewis's *Out of the Silent Planet.*

And there's a second shipload of humans, non-Quakers, due. They are known as the Sixers, from their ship's name, the *Down Plus Six.* (Both shiploads make up a vital effort by Earth to save humanity from deliberately non-specified disaster, implied to be social rather than natural.) And the hrossa have forbidden any expansion of the humans beyond the one small valley they've already occupied. They have forbidden the use of most mechanical devices as well.

The sinking feeling comes from a slight sense of *deja vu;* how often have we seen the good-guy humans trying to save the good-guy aliens from the bad-guy humans?

That's the bad news; the good news is that while Moffett doesn't stray too far off this well-beaten path, she treads it with a good deal of intelligence and more than a few original touches.

The hrossa, with whom communication is still shaky, imply that their planet is a living entity and that it will bring disaster on any humans that disobey the restrictions placed on them. The Quakers believe them, but the Sixers don't, and suspect the Quakers of having fallen under some sort of malign telepathic influence. The Sixers also believe that the importance of their mission, which could possibly mean the survival of humanity, overrides any moral obligations they have to the primitives.

In the first half of the novel, the Quakers, who believe the hrossa implicitly but realize that they've been too busy surviving to really study the aliens closely, send five

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of their number to live with them to get evidence that they are indeed telling the truth. This section would have got the book banned twenty years ago, since it is almost completely concerned with sex. The hrossa are seasonally sexual, and their empathetic broadcasts turn on the humans to all sorts of combinations, including human/alien and father/son. Let me hasten to assure the neo-puritans out there, however, that it's presented fairly graphically but with little or no prurience, and the experiences have strong relevance to what the humans find out about Pennterra's life forms. (In fact, this goes on almost too long; one is quite weary of sex by the time the humans go home.)

The rest of the novel chronicles the events that follow, and the fulfillment of the hrossa "threat" against the Sixers, who have established their own colony. This comes as a bit of an anticlimax, as it were, after the first part, but only relatively; *Pennterra* is a very strong first novel indeed.

Roadies

Desolation Road

By Ian McDonald

Bantam, $3.95 (paper)

There are those frustrating books that are indescribable in a short space—or in a long space, too, for that matter, since the indescribability comes from style and tone, not content. About all you can do is say that the story is about *this* but the writing of it is so *that* that the story doesn't really matter, and then make some comparisons to other writers and hope that your reader gets the idea.

Ian McDonald's *Desolation Road* starts out with an eccentric wanderer founding a town in a desert. He chooses that particular spot for several reasons—his wind-board has just sailed off by itself (he having forgotten to tether it), there's a railroad track and a large metal relay tower at that particular place, and an intelligent terra-forming satellite has chosen that locale to crash land and die. Dr. Alimantando, following the advice of the dying machine, cannibalizes its parts and begins the town of Desolation Road.

One learns of the odd lot of hobos, layabouts, and wanderers who gradually populate the town, and, with very little help from the author, slowly comes to realize that the desert is on a renovated Mars, and that the planet has been receiving excess population from Earth for less than a century. Already an eccentric culture has grown up; there are towns named Wisdom, China Mountain, and Belladonna (the last an underground sin city, a "sailor's whore of a city"). And the most eccentric of the eccentric seem to settle in the unmarked-on-any-map, unofficial town of Desolation Road. There's Rajandra Das, who charms machines; Mr. Jericho, a sort of Godfather of "the Exalted Families" who is on the run and has a computer chip in his brain contain-

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ing the wisdom of his ancestors; Persis Tatterdemalion, sole proprietor and performer in The Astounding Tatterdemalion Air Bazaar, a one woman, one ring flying circus, who crash lands in Desolation Road; and an asylum-load of others.

The novel follows their destinies as Desolation Road suffers everything from armed revolution to time displacement, and the destinies of their offspring as they spread across Mars, becoming such various celebrities as the Gray Lady of the Poor Children of the Immaculate Contraption and The Greatest Snooker Player the Universe Had Ever Known.

As you can see, the inspiration is insanely surreal; it's also nonstop. The comparisons can be made, most immediately to Charles Finney and his immortal *Circus of Dr. Lao.* There's a soupçon of early Bradbury, and Ballard's Vermilion Sands isn't too far down the track from Desolation Road.

Needless to say, it won't be everybody's cup of tea, and even for those that it is, there may be too much of it. This sort of maniac cleverness should be taken in small doses (*Dr. Lao,* you may remember, is a very short book).

Merlin's Folks

Taliesin

By Stephen R. Lawhead

Crossway Books, $10.95 (paper)

Christianity and science fiction and fantasy are not mutually exclusive, as has been proved conclusively by C. S. Lewis. The subtle use of Christian teachings and myth combined with awesomely wondrous imaginings has made the Perelandra Trilogy a milestone in SF history (was there ever a more beautifully conceived other world than Lewis's Perelandra/Venus?). His Narnia series is less subtle, perhaps, but still great fantasy. But so far, within my experience, he stands alone in this difficult area, though one hopes that a new fusion of the unlikely ingredients will come along.

Stephen Lawhead's *Taliesin* isn't it. Here Lawhead, in the first of a trilogy, begins an Arthurian cycle. Since the Christian factor is already built in, it would seem a ready vehicle, but that may be part of the problem. The pagan/witch faction in the Arthurian legends has always been by far the most interesting; only T.H. White has obtained any sympathy for the Christian crowd, and that was by thoroughly *de*emphasizing the Christian element.

Lawhead starts working far ahead; the novel essentially concerns Merlin's parents. He alternates chapters about Charis, a princess of one of the nine kingdoms of Atlantis in the Western Seas, and Taliesin, brought up by Celts in late Roman Britain.

The Celts spend a lot of time doing the usual Celtic things — fighting off the Picts, telling legends straight out of the Mabynogian, finding lost infants in their salmon weir and adopting them.

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They're a really nice, polite bunch, even to the fast-fading Romans with whom they have an alliance. The Atlanteans spend a lot of time doing the usual Atlantean things—bull dancing à la Knossos, worshipping Bel, and ignoring the earth tremors that shake their marble palaces. It's a most eclectic culture: in addition to the Minoan and Phoenician elements already mentioned, one of their kingdoms is called Poseidonis, and the chief adviser to Charis's father is called Annubi.

Due to the inroads of the barbarians, Taliesin's Celts head south to Llyonesse (more or less Cornwall). Due to the inroads of the volcanoes, Charis and some of her people take ship and end up in the same place, where they build some more marble halls, and get the reputation of being fairies (or fair folk, because they're fair). About here enter two Christian priests in search of the ancient church built by Joseph of Arimethea, who had come to Cornwall very early on, bringing the Grail with him. They convert Charis's father, who has a chronic war wound, and has taken up fishing, therefore being known as the Fisher King (Arthurian scholars take note).

Charis and Taliesin, who is a super minstrel and has had Christian visions even before encountering the priests, meet, fall in love, get married, and have a lot of problems and a baby, whom they name Merlin. End of Book 1.

Let's just say that, unlike Lewis's work, *Taliesin* is stiff, derivative, and unsubtle in its message.

Good Dirty Fun

The Wordsmiths & the Warguild

By Hugh Cook

Dufour Editions, $18.95

I didn't latch on to the first part of Hugh Cook's "Chronicles of the Age of Darkness," *The Wizards and the Warriors* (published in the U.S. as *Wizard War*) soon enough to cover it in this column. This was your loss (unless you discovered it on your own) and my error, since it was quite a do—a big fat novel chockablock with magic, action, and probably the single cleverest use of magical devices I've come across in fantasy. It involved two bottles that are much, *much* larger inside than they are outside, and what happens when one of them gets inside the other. The handling of the permutations of this circumstance is fiendishly clever.

Now the second novel is out, and I can bend my already well-creased rule about sequels because it isn't a sequel, really. Apparently the Chronicles are to be separate narratives taking place in the same slightly whacko world with some referential overlap, but not enough to make them interdependent (translation—you don't have to read one to enjoy the others).

This one is *The Wordsmiths and the Warguild*. The Wordsmiths is an order devoted to figuring out the workings of the odex, an artifact dating back to before the Days of Wrath. (There are hints that this

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world is a future Earth the magic of which is really a sort of mad technology, but don't worry about it). The odex is a sort of gateway which responds to words, spewing forth all sorts of unlikely stuff such as several tons of cheese, monsters substantial and insubstantial, and vegetable peels. (It also acts as a handy trash disposal going the other way.) Trouble is nobody can figure out which words trigger which ejaculations, and this is the task to which the wordsmiths are dedicated.

(Don't worry about the Warguild, either—it doesn't play that large a part in the narrative.)

The story concerns a classic bumbling hero, Togura Poulaan, who is sent on a quest by the Wordsmiths. He is more or less searching for the index, which could be a clue to the workings of the odex. He has a certain interest in this, since he has rather carelessly allowed his lady-love to be swallowed by the odex and hopes that he may get it to regurgitate her. He's also rather vaguely looking to lose his virginity. He's a hopeless hero—constantly going astray and getting lost, forgetting the necessary magic words for this and that, and despite incessant opportunities, not even gaining any carnal knowledge. In the meantime, he is thrown to sea serpents, attacked by killer rocks, lives with cannibals, betrayed by pirates, and lured by spectres into mysterious mounds. One of *those* bottles even turns up briefly.

Cook maintains a mad stream of inventiveness which seems to be particularly British; the fantastic people, places, and things keep popping up without a pause. The humor is violent and raunchy, perhaps too much so. Dismembering, cannibalism, mutilation, vomiting, and *outré* sex are confronted by our Candide-like hero maybe a few times too often to maintain their humor. On the other hand, there are some neat swipes at various sacred cows, such as the noble savage: "[The primitives] had a healthy spiritual attitude toward the land, which they regarded as a communal heritage; they celebrated this healthy spiritual attitude by butchering anybody they caught trespassing . . ."; and the pretentious swordsman: " 'Out, vermin! Do you not know the dread doom which stalks in the midnight black of Zenjingu fighters?' 'No,' said the baron, frankly."

Blishful

The Tale That Wags the God

By James Blish, edited by Cy Chauvin
Advent, $15.00

James Blish, who died in 1975, has left a mixed legacy in the field of SF. In fiction, there were several minor classics: the four short novels which comprise *Cities in Flight,* and an odd series, the components of which were variously fantasy and SF (*Black Easter* and *A Case of Conscience* the best-known of the four) with the overall title of "After Such Knowledge." To the pop au-

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dience, he's remembered for having novelized twelve Star Trek episodes (the ones titled *Star Trek, Star Trek Two* and so on), the first writer to put ST into print.

For those into the esthetics of SF, he's remembered as a prolific critic and essayist on the field. Though he never wrote consistently for any particular journal, he published pieces *about* science fiction in many places, from *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction* to *American Libraries,* under the name of William Atheling. Two books of these essays were published some time ago (*The Issue at Hand* and *More Issues at Hand*). Two more volumes were projected, but never done; bits of those and other matter go to make up a new volume, *The Tale That Wags the God.*

The title was an alternative one used for the lead essay, "The Function of Science Fiction," an impassioned apologia for the field in a period when the general attitude toward it was summed up by Kingsley Amis with: "Sf's no good," they bellow till we're deaf/"But this looks good."—"Well, then it's not Sf."

Blish approached the field as an intellectual, a rare viewpoint in a period when almost everyone in science fiction was intelligent, but *not* intellectual (or would have disclaimed the title even if they had been). Another piece tackles "The Arts in Science Fiction" and, at about half the length of that one, "The Science in Science Fiction." And a piece with a sharp edge of wit on the various definitions and putative antecedents of SF bears the engaging title of "Probapossible Prolegomena to Ideareal History."

Also included, among others, are essays on Poul Anderson, a fragment of autobiography, a revealing interview with Brian Aldiss, and an exhaustive Blish bibliography compiled by Judith L. Blish. One can agree or disagree with Blish's theories and conclusions—I haven't the space here to do either, but it *is* good to see an intelligent book about science fiction appearing in a period which again seems to reflect the Amis couplet quoted above.

World in Brackett's

The Big Jump

By Leigh Brackett

Tor, $2.95 (paper)

Science fiction's background universe was a lot different back in mid-century. You usually had nine colonized planets in the Solar System (at least one of which had an exotic other-race history—more often than not, Mars). Traveling between them was as easy as catching a shuttle. Aliens were aliens, though often humanoid, and got along somehow without sociologically complicated cultures. The only thing that took a lot of space to explain was FTL travel, which had to be pseudoscientifically justified. The heroes were tough working stiffs (pilots, miners, or mechanics) who talked like Sam Spade. Heroines were often upper class, but equally tough and morally ambig-

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uous. It was a simpler universe, but, depending on the writer, was as much fun and probably more inventive than most of what's done these days. The point then was to be as *original* as possible, since SF wasn't a *market* (with all that implies—mainly, if it sells, repeat it).

Leigh Brackett was one of the few female writers of the "Golden Age." She was also one of the best of either sex. *The Big Jump* was first published in *Space Stories* in 1953. The first interstellar ship (sponsored by one of those corporate families based on the Fords) returns, carrying only one of the five expedition members. He is deranged and peculiarly changed physically, and the Cochrane Corp. people keep him isolated.

Arch Comyn, the hero (see above), bulls his way in to see him, and hears his dying words, clues to what was found out there. Comyn is only concerned with one of the other expedition members, his best buddy who had earlier saved his life. But he is now in possession of knowledge that the Cochranes want.

He is beaten up, tailed, lured by a beautiful Cochrane granddaughter (named Sydna—see above) to the family "castle" on the Moon, and eventually he bluffs his way onto the second "big jump" mounted by the Cochranes. The dying man's words had implied a source of transuranic elements that *they* want, but also sounded a warning about the Transuranae, mysterious beings responsible for the loss of the other expedition members.

What Comyn and Co. find is more than a little unexpected (see above *re* originality), so why spoil it by telling? One can but say it is exotic in the best pulp tradition, as well as posing an interesting philosophical question, perhaps simplistically but hardly simplemindmindedly. Maybe the best thing about reading the good vintage stuff is that they don't fall into the current mold; they take off in unexpected directions and come to unexpected resolutions. For instance, not having read this particular Brackett before, I hadn't a clue as to how it was going to end until I got there.

Shoptalk

The sequels keep piling up—some you may have missed and would want to know about include: *A Lion on Tharthee* by Grant Callin, being the further adventures of Callin's engaging archeologist, Kurious Whitedimple (Baen, $3.50); *A Gathering of Heroes* by Paul Edwin Zimmer, the long-awaited next book in the "Dark Border" series (Ace, $3.50, paper); *Dahut* by Poul and Karen Anderson, which is of course Book III of "The King of Ys" (and the floodgates *do* open in this one) (Baen, $3.95, paper). Timothy Zahn's Cobra strikes again in *Cobra Bargain* (Baen, $3.95, paper).

Recent publications from those associated with this magazine include: *Fantastic Voyage II: Destination Brain* by Isaac Asimov,

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Doubleday, $18.95; *Isaac Asimov Presents the Great SF Stories: 17 (1955)* edited by Isaac Asimov and Martin H. Greenberg, DAW, $3.50 (paper).

Books to be considered for review in this column should be submitted to Baird Searles, Suite 133, 380 Bleecker St., New York, New York, 10014. ●

NEXT ISSUE

Nebula-and-Hugo winner **Robert Silverberg** returns to these pages next month with our June cover story, "Gilgamesh in Uruk." Silverberg's Gilgamesh stories have been among our most popular stories in recent years, with one of them taking a Hugo Award in 1987; the series follows the adventures of Gilgamesh the King in Hell, a lively place chockablock with the most famous of the Departed, who meet and interact with each other in the most surprising of ways. If you've been enjoying the Gilgamesh stories, don't miss "Gilgamesh in Uruk," the final story in the series, and one of the most entertaining. From a mythological Hell, **James Patrick Kelly** takes us back to our own modern world and to a more immediate Hell of our own devising, in the gritty and powerful "Home Front," which will quite probably be one of the most talked-about stories of 1988. And Nebula-winner **Nancy Kress** is also on hand for June, spinning an elegant, eloquent, and razor-sharp tale of the persistence of memory, "In Memoriam."

Also in June: Much has been written about First Contact, but next issue **Jack McDevitt** instead takes us thousands of years into the future for a poignant look at humanity's "Last Contact"; Nebula-winner **John Kessel** returns with the deceptively-quiet story of how "Mrs. Shummel Exits a Winner"; **Eileen Gunn** makes her *IAsfm* debut with a very funny story that features one of the most bizarre career-advancement ploys anyone is ever likely to see, in "Stable Strategies for Middle Management"; new writer **Martha Soukup** makes her *IAsfm* debut with a cold-blooded, hackle-raising little shocker, "Having Keith"; and **Phillip C. Jennings,** who made his own *IAsfm* debut here just a few issues ago, returns with "Messiah," the strange and evocative generation-spanning saga of a man who spends his afterlife as, among other things, a traffic light (yes, as you've probably guessed, this *is* an odd one . . . but it's also one you're not going to want to miss!). All this, plus an array of columns and features. Don't miss our jampacked June issue, on sale on your newsstands on May 3, 1988.

Coming soon: new stories by **Somtow Sucharitkul, Lucius Shepard, Jane Yolen, John Barnes, Harry Turtledove, Karen Joy Fowler, Avram Davidson, Orson Scott Card, Eric Vinicoff, Judith Moffett, Neal Barrett, Jr., Lisa Goldstein, Connie Willis, Howard Waldrop, Sharon N. Farber,** and many others . . .

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SF CONVENTIONAL CALENDAR

by Erwin S. Strauss

The Spring con(vention) season is in full swing. Plan now for social weekends with your favorite SF authors, editors, artists, and fellow fans. For a longer, later list, an explanation of cons; & a sample of SF folksongs, send me an SASE (addressed, stamped #10 [business] envelope) at 4271 Duke St. #D-10, Alexandria VA 22304. The hot line is (703) 823-3117. If a machine answers, leave your area code & number. I'll call back on my nickel. For free listings, tell me about your con six months ahead. Early evening's often a good time to phone cons. When writing, enclose an SASE. Look for me at cons behind the Filthy Pierre badge, with a music keyboard.

MARCH, 1988

24-27—**NorwesCon.** For info, write: **Box 24207, Seattle WA 98124.** Or call: **(206) 723-2101 or 789-0599** (10 AM to 10 PM, not collect). Con will be held in: Tacoma WA (if city omitted, same as in address) at the Tacoma Sheraton. Guests will include: Marion Zimmer (Darkover) Bradley, David (Tribbles) Gerrold, artist Rick Sternbach. Over 100 pros (authors, artists, editors, etc.) expected.

24-27—**AggieCon. (409) 845-1515.** Texas A&M U. campus, College Station TX. Joe Haldeman, Eggleton.

25-27—**Magnum Opus Con. (912) 781-6110.** Iron Works, Columbus GA. Hal Clement, L. S. de Camp, S. R. Donaldson, P. J. Farmer, G. R. R. Martin, N. Spinrad, J. Williamson, many Star Trek/comics guests.

26—**AprilCon. (212) 280-3611.** Ferris Booth Hall, Columbia U., New York NY. By Barnard/Col. SF Soc.

APRIL, 1988

1-3—**BaltiCon, Box 686, Baltimore MD 21203.** At 2,000 to 3,000 members, the biggest SF non-WorldCon.

1-3—**MiniCon, Box 8297, Lake Stn., Minneapolis MN 55408.** This is held each year on Easter weekend.

1-3—**LepreCon. (602) 838-6873, 839-2543, 968-7790.** Hyatt Regency, Phoenix AZ. Gutierrez, Barnes.

1-3—**KinKon. (03) 793-1706.** Melbourne, Australia. The national con isn't till June 10 this year.

1-4—**FollyCon. (0272) 698-322.** Adelphi Hotel, Liverpool, England. The British National SF Con.

15-17—**ICon, Box 550, Stony Brook NY 11790. (516) 632-6460.** On the State University campus.

22-24—**Name That Con, Box 525, St. Charles MO 63301. (314) 773-6626 or 946-9147.** St. Louis MO.

22-24—**SwampCon, Box 14238, Baton Rouge LA 70898. (504) 342-1337/5353, 355-8246, 346-1011.**

29-1 May—**Corflu, Box 1786, Seattle WA 98111.** Fanzine fans' con. The original form of fandom.

29-1May—**AmigoCon, Box 3177, El Paso TX 79923.** Artist Brad Foster. At the Holiday Inn Sunland.

SEPTEMBER, 1988

1-5—**NoLaCon II, 921 Canal #831, New Orleans LA 70112. (504) 525-6008.** WorldCon. $70 in advance.

AUGUST, 1989

31-Sep. 4—**Noreascon 3, Box 46, MIT PO, Cambridge MA 02139.** WorldCon. $60 to 7/15/88.

AUGUST, 1990

23-27—**ConFiction, Box 95370-2509 CJ., The Hague, Holland.** WorldCon. $65 to 12/1/88.

28-Sep. 1—**ConDiego, Box 203534, San Diego CA 92120. (619) 265-0903.** The North American SF Con (NASFiC), held since WorldCon is abroad. $35 through at least 1987. Dates estimated (actual TBA).

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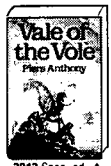

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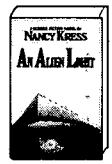

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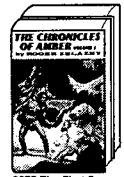

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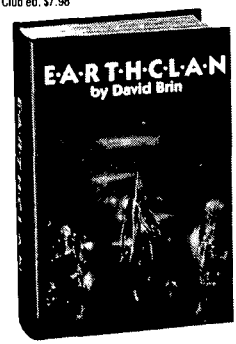

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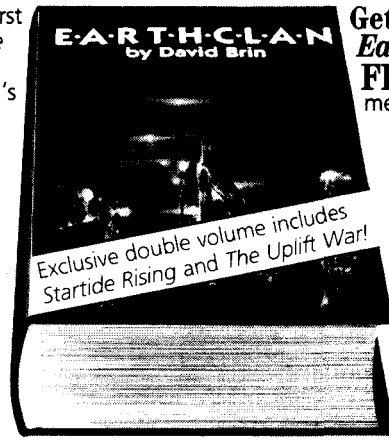

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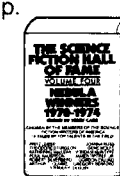

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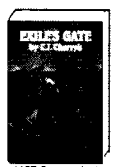

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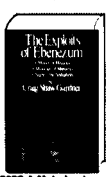

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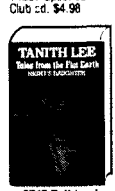

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